

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

Horizon

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

POETRY FOR POETRY'S SAKE AND POETRY BEYOND POETRY
By STEPHEN SPENDER

THE CONCERT. By ROBIN ANDERSON

POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. By GEORGE ORWELL

WILFREDO LAM. By PIERRE LOEB

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CONTENTS

PAGE

POETRY FOR POETRY'S SAKE AND POETRY BEYOND POETRY	<i>Stephen Spender</i>	221
THE CONCERT	<i>Robin Anderson</i>	239
POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE	<i>George Orwell</i>	252
WILFREDO LAM	<i>Pierre Loeb</i>	265
LETTERS FROM IRELAND—I	<i>Derek Hill</i>	268
II	<i>Vivian Mercier</i>	276
SELECTED NOTICES:		
ECLIPSE	<i>H. d'Avigdor Goldsmid</i>	286
ORION NEW ROAD FOCUS ONE NOW	<i>Diana Witherby</i>	287

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appear between pages 264 and 265

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STEPHEN SPENDER

POETRY FOR POETRY'S
SAKE AND POETRY
BEYOND POETRY

POEMS are hypothetical and theorematic. The hypothesis of a poem is the emotional experience, the moment of vision, the flash of insight, the *ligne donnée*, the central point of impulses and impressions: it is the validity of this moment which the consistency of the poetic logic proves. The coherence of the demonstration of the original hypothesis makes a poem 'true', not its general truth. Notoriously, everything about Keats's *Ode to a Grecian Urn* is poetically true and convincing until Keats, in the last two lines, goes outside poetic truth and makes a raid on general truth in 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Immediately here he has entered a world where ideas can be disputed, because he has gone outside his original hypothesis which centres on the concrete experience of the Grecian urn.

That 'poems are hypothetical and theorematic', is all, like beauty, that a critic of his contemporaries need know. If he takes the lesson well to heart, he will combine the two widely separated but quite essential qualities of contemporary criticism: the greatest tolerance and sympathy with the experiences, inspirations, technical devices and form of his contemporaries, combined with the greatest strictness as to the poetic logic (once the hypothesis has been accepted) with which these are carried out. The problem is to have a standard which is wide enough to accept the newest experiences and the most experimental devices (or, for that matter, the oldest conventions and subjects) combined with one which is scrupulously critical of method. The critic must be tolerant of the hypothesis; but he must scrutinize very closely the theorem.

Beyond this, there lies the criticism of the hypothesis itself. When we discuss the difference between a major and a minor poem, having agreed that the poems are successful demonstrations of their hypotheses, we then abstract the hypothesis and measure

it against general truth. To say that a poet is a 'major poet' is not a purely poetic judgement. Within poetry itself, there are no such things as major and minor poets, there are just poets who write poems, and once a poem has been accepted as a poem, there is nothing more to be said. The distinction between 'major' and 'minor' implies an acceptance of the social function of poetry, a measuring of poetic truth against general truth. This is the distinction which it is most difficult for contemporaries to observe, because we have no means of judging the greatest truth and the most significant experience, amongst all present events and ideas. Moreover, since all the time the claims of contemporary ideas, events and experiences press themselves very closely on us, the appearance of these things in poetry is disconcerting and liable to arouse feelings of sympathy or antipathy in us which have little to do with the poetry considered as poetry.

Thus, when criticism moves from judging the poetry in a poem as poetry, it moves to judging the poem as a 'criticism of life', or as having a content of living experience, apart from an achievement as created poetry. *The Essay on Man* is 'greater' than a song of Shakespeare's simply because it is longer, it deals with a wider subject-matter and so on, not because it is more perfectly expressed. And the *Divine Comedy* is greater than either, because it deals with a more universal picture of living experience. Some poems of a poet are 'more ambitious' we say than others; and here we use the words 'more ambitious' in a worldly rather than a poetic sense, meaning that they aim higher, that they say more, and that they attempt to deal with a grander subject-matter.

This measuring of comparative greatness is therefore a very difficult task in the criticism of contemporary criticism, because here we are not just measuring poetry as poetry, but poetry as a means of expressing in poems ideas and themes to which we attach importance. Now for a poet, his own experiences which he can express in poetry are the only poetically important ones. We live today in an age of overwhelming public events. These events seem to have an importance which makes many people—journalists in particular—feel that they ought to be put into poetry. The people who considered themselves the mouthpieces of the recent war were particularly incensed at the reluctance of the majority of poets to put their distinguished client into metre and rhyme. The poets were equally full of disavowals. From

them, was a chorus of 'We do not want to be war poets'. And, of course, in a sense there were no war poets. That is to say no good poems were written which were—to use Mr. Geoffrey Grigson's words in his Comment at the beginning of Oscar Williams's anthology *The War Poets*—'thumps on the tub, the morale poems'. But in another sense, there were war poets. That is to say, the war certainly became the deeply experienced emotion which contributed to the poems of all, or almost all, the true poets writing during the war.

Of course, these things could not have been otherwise: the war was incapable of producing war poets and at the same time the poets were incapable of not being war poets. The whole controversy about war poets is therefore futile, and I only draw attention to it because it raises the question of whether one should judge every contemporary poem simply as poetic achievement, that is, as the poetic theorem based on the hypothesis, or whether one should also take 'great' or 'small', 'major' or 'minor' subject-matter into account. This is today a valid question not merely for critics, but also for poets. Because if critics consider poetry simply as poetry, with no regard to the wordly, the prosaic, the unpoetic scale which measures poetry according to the significance of the subject-matter in a hierarchy of actual events, then there is no reason for poets ever to be 'ambitious'. Impure and ambitious poetic aims may be defended, and, in fact, by implication always have been, on the ground that worldly greatness and large-scale events can transform themselves into poetic greatness. Today there is evidently a reaction from this point of view. Most modern poets, finding themselves living in a world whose events are often summed up only too correctly as 'like a scene from Dante's *Inferno*' are appalled by the scale of their world and look inside themselves for something smaller. So far from wanting to write epics, they belong to a society for the protection of poetry from the epic. Impurity creeps in by way not of grandiosity but of the search for a philosophy of life. Some of the best poets have returned to the metaphysical source of inspiration.

Mr. Robert Graves is opposed to all impurities, past and present. He writes of a purely poetic subject-matter, and here his Foreword to his *Poems 1938-1945* is most illuminating:

‘Since poems should be self-explanatory I refrain from more foreword than this: that I write poems for poets, and satires or grotesques for wits. For people in general I write prose, and am content that they should be unaware that I do anything else. To write poems for other than poets is wasteful. The moral of the Scilly islanders who earned a precarious livelihood by taking in one another’s washing is that they never upset their carefully balanced island economy by trying to horn into the laundry of the mainland; and that nowhere in the Western Hemisphere was washing so well done.’

This is not only a shrewd self-appraisal, it is also a shrewd criticism of Mr. Graves’s fellow poets who ‘horn into’ religion, philosophy, psychology, politics, events and occasions. And Mr. Graves’s own poems have the air often of being solid and wry little touchstones which, self-contained and unconcerned as they are with other poems than themselves, yet somehow imply a gritty comment on most of their contemporaries by other poets.

The full moon easterly rising, furious,
Against a winter sky ragged with red;
The hedges high in snow, and owls raving—
Solemnities not easy to withstand:
A shiver wakes the spine.

In boyhood, having encountered the scene,
I suffered horror: I fetched the moon home,
With owls and snow, to nurse in my head
Throughout the trials of a new spring,
Famine unassuaged.

But fell in love, and made a lodgement
Of love on those chill ramparts.
Her image was my ensign: snows melted,
Hedges sprouted, the moon tenderly shone,
The owls trilled with tongues of the nightingale.

These were all lies, though they matched the time,
And brought me less than luck: her image
Warped in the weather, turned beldamish.
Then back came winter on me at a bound,
The pallid sky heaved with a moon-quake.

Dangerous it had been with love-notes
To serenade Queen Famine.
In tears I recompensed the former scene,
Let the snow lie, watched the moon rise, suffered the owls,
Paid homage to them of unevent.

I quote this exquisite poem, *A Love Story*, in full because it is not only an almost perfect example of Mr. Graves's manner but it also saves me trouble by supplying its own comment in the last line 'Paid homage to them of unevent'. For the point is that nothing happens, nothing is said, in Mr. Graves's poems except the poetry. One has the impression in this poem of a lifetime having been passed to no purpose, except to extract the poetic metal from the ore of experience. One is then given the pure ore, with no comment, no message, no consolation, and the poem exists by its complete negation of extra-poetic ambition. Mr. Graves writes a kind of pure poetry which is different from the search for the pure phrase, the pure line, the pure music of the French purists: it is the rather roughly hewn poetry of a purely poetic experience. Compare the above lines with T. S. Eliot even at his most detached in *Four Quartets* (*Little Gidding*) and one sees at once the difference:

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house—
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.
The death of hope and despair,
This is the death of air.

This is not the extraction of poetry from life, it is the judgement of life by poetry.

There are flood and drouth
Over the eyes and in the mouth,
Dead water and dead sand
Contending for the upper hand.
The parched eviscerate soil
Gapes at the vanity of toil,
Laughs without mirth,
This is the death of earth.

Here Eliot creates his vision of life for us in order that we may reach beyond it to his belief, to his experience of prayer, his further vision of timelessness.

Critics were surely right who saw in *The Waste Land* a general picture of a civilization collapsing into chaos. The strength of this picture was the extraordinary range of different colours of experience on which Eliot was able to draw: some of them evidently experiences of a highly personal nature, some of them derived from literature. The total effect was of one overwhelming experience with a sombre colour and a broken texture of its own, conveying a general picture of despair. But this despair was of a personal kind, even though many people shared it, and if Eliot had written nothing after *The Waste Land* future critics might well have thought of him as one of those poets, like Webster or Tournour (with whom, indeed, at this stage he seemed to feel a kinship), who poured a personal despair, perhaps also representative of their age, into their poetry.

After *The Waste Land*, Eliot became a different kind of poet. He did not abandon his personal experience, but he used it as the colours with which to paint a picture of a different experience. The despairing experience is still there (as in the lines quoted above) but it is used to depict the experience of faith.

Graves uses experience as an ore from which to extract poetry, many poets use poetry as a means of expressing their general deductions from experience, Eliot uses experience of death as a means of depicting timelessness and eternity. The thought behind Eliot's later poetry is thought living its way into poetry. It is not necessarily and uniquely poetic, though it justifies itself poetically because Eliot does not write it until it has become part of his poetic experience. But *Four Quartets* is the poetic expression of ideas in Eliot's mind which, considered as ideas, are religious and philosophic, though they justify themselves in poetry. Poetry is here used as a particular use of language to convey the experience of religious and philosophic thought. Sometimes the thought strains against the medium and is not completely achieved as poetry.

Four Quartets is not only poetic experience, but it also means something which could be expressed in another way than poetry, though in so far as poetry is achieved, the imagery, music, etc., which make it poetry could not, of course, be expressed in any

other way. The language therefore moves on two levels: one is the creative level of poetry in which images and delightful objects are created which give us pleasure, the other is the level of philosophic thought. These two levels are sustained throughout, and thus the language has a kind of transparency: one looks through the picture, to the thought behind it, as though the images and colours were painted on glass, with a light shining behind. Some younger critics call this kind of writing, in which language is used with the greatest precision in order to express a movement of thought (which could be expressed in other words, if it were separated from the delightful poetic movement superimposed on the thought) the 'new classicism'; and they call a more recent tendency in poetry, in which objects are created without a thoughtful meaning behind them, the 'new romanticism'. I think that these terms are confusing, and it would be more valuable to draw a distinction between *transparent* poetry and *opaque* poetry. Eliot and Auden use language transparently; Dylan Thomas, Edith Sitwell, Vernon Watkins, use it opaquely.

Auden uses poetry more and more as a language of metaphors with which to work out his philosophy. His 1945 volume contains *The Sea and the Mirror* which is a commentary on Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and *A Christmas Oratorio*. The two levels, of thought and poetic language, which I have spoken of in connection with *Four Quartets* are sustained throughout. It is easier to be delighted with Auden's virtuosity in form, his charm of language, and his wonderful power of invention, than to follow his thought. I confess that here I am rather at a loss, because I have never been able to understand with immediacy his metaphorical language, which often seems to me a very eccentric habit of thinking, and I know that other readers do follow it unobstructedly. To take an example (a comparatively simple one) from the Preface to *The Sea and the Mirror*. The Stage Manager says:

O what authority gives
Existence its surprise?
Science is happy to answer
That the ghosts who haunt our lives
Are handy with mirrors and wire,
That song and sugar and fire,
Courage and come-hither eyes

Have a genius for taking pains.
But how does one think up a habit?
Our wonder, our terror remains.

Art opens the fishiest eye
To the Flesh and the Devil who heat
The Chamber of Temptation
Where heroes roar and die.
We are wet with sympathy now;
Thanks for the evening; but how
Shall we satisfy when we meet,
Between Shall-I and I-Will,
The lion's mouth whose hunger
No metaphors can fill:

The reader may judge me stupid to be puzzled by these lines, and I quote them precisely because I believe in honest dealing and feel that he should know where I am stupid. The language appears to me to have happiness; it has verbal character quite apart from what it means. The trouble is that the imagery forms a kind of barrier between me and the thought, which I feel I would understand better in prose. I see that the problem of the first stanza quoted is the philosophical one of the thing-in-itself. The images in this stanza are used in a concrete scientific way, almost as in textbooks of philosophy. In the next stanza we shift from the problem of knowledge to that of moral philosophy. Here the barrier which obscures the thought for me is the line 'Art opens the fishiest eye'. Since 'song and sugar and fire' are meant very concretely as things inhabited by the ghosts who are the inner core of reality, and since the 'Flesh and the Devil' are also meant very concretely, it is difficult not to think of 'the fishiest eye' as the same kind of lecture-demonstrator's imagery. To do so, of course, destroys one's chances of understanding the rest. The left hand of Auden's thought often seems to be eluding the right hand of his poetic invention. Although both hands are moving very quickly, at the same time, and although Auden's mind is very active, he does not seem at all anxious to make the reader understand what he has to say. At the same time, this elusiveness is certainly not the result of clumsiness or intellectual confusion. There seems no doubt that Auden himself understands very well

what he has to say: his obscurity is not so much of his poetic idiom as of the idiom of his Thought; and this produces the curious effect sometimes that everything seems far clearer and smoother and easier than it really is. Occasionally, too, one is rewarded by passages of inspired translucency, such as the beautiful speech of Alonso to Ferdinand, which begins:

Dear Son, when the warm multitudes cry,
Ascend your throne majestically,
But keep in mind the waters where fish
See sceptres descending with no wish
To touch them; sit regal and erect,
But imagine the sands where a crown
Has the status of a broken-down
Sofa or mutilated statue:
Remember as bells and cannon boom
The cold deep that does not envy you,
The sunburnt superficial kingdom
Where a king is an object.

Auden has arrived at a stage of his development where he says with Prospero in his *The Sea and the Mirror*:

Now, Ariel, I am that I am, your late and lonely master
Who knows now what magic is;—the power to enchant
That comes from disillusion.

The enchantment is deliberate, conscious and sustained. The world having been 'seen through' as a system of symbols which have no validity apart from the value which man attaches to them, the necessity of attaching such values is also seen, and the myth is reconstructed for the sake of an intellectual and a moral necessity. In Auden's world everything and everyone is either a 'symptom', that is to say a neurotic gesture towards a significance which is not achieved, or else a 'symbol', that is to say a gesture which has worked its way into a coherent pattern of other gestures. Auden is the only person who knows his own highly idiomatic world. He can tell Shakespeare what *The Tempest* is about, he can tell the *New Testament* what Christmas is about, elevating myths and behaviour to a vibrant condition of complex self-consciousness, and re-stating them in the idiom of his own mind, which has added the idiom of late Henry James to that of psycho-analysts

and physicists, and mixed them all into a prematurely 'late Auden' manner of his own. It is the wonderful translucency with which he grasps exceedingly difficult mental positions and restates them in a language transparent as glass—glass with a surface which distorts everything seen through it: it is this which makes him the most intelligent of modern poets. The form, although always mastered, seems very arbitrary: if he expresses an idea in a sestina, there is no reason, one feels, why he should not have expressed it equally well, say, in a ballade, or in a sequence of two sonnets. His long works are curiously lacking in a sense of structure. Even *The Sea and the Mirror*, which requires little form, being only a Commentary, is nevertheless bogged by the immensely long and turgid prose of Caliban, who speaks in a manner which would seem so late and involved even for Henry James as to be positively posthumous.

What one longs for in Auden's poetry is the contact with and the wonder of a real and immediate concrete experience whose diamond hardness and intrinsicality refuses the attempt to turn it into an intellectualized symbol. There is plenty of mystification in his work but no mystery. He is mystifying because he knows things so much better than the reader and because he sees always beyond and through his subject-matter to the pattern of theory behind: he is never mysterious, because the mere fact that things exist, the fact that one does not always understand, the fact that things happen as they happen, the fact that events exist in all the isolation of their own exactness, all this does not amaze him.

Auden and Eliot both use poetry as a language of symbols with which to express a system of thought. Poetry enables them to give life to their philosophies, for it is the means by which they explore the ability of their thought to live its way into their poetic experiences. For Eliot, however, the irresolvable intrinsicality of things which can be pointed to by way of illustration but which cannot be melted down into mental symbols still exists. *Four Quartets* is full of such indications of things, of scenes, of atmosphere, which exist in themselves, and which provide us with windows out of Eliot's spiritual habitation into the world which we share with him. To read Eliot you have, intellectually, to be with him, but he is also with you in the world that you know, the world 'Where you lean against a bank while a van passes'. To read Auden, you have to inhabit his mental world

entirely. If 'the green hill sits always by the sea', it is not just because it is there, but for a very good psycho-religio-politico reason.

With Edith Sitwell we enter an entirely different kind of world. Miss Sitwell's poetry is poetry for poetry's sake, it is not poetry beyond poetry. Neither is it pure poetry in the sense of seeking only to express a purely poetic kind of experience, as with Graves. It expresses a developing experience of life and of the world. With Miss Sitwell one may speak of a real development of her whole personality in her poetry, while with Graves there has been no such development, there has only been a purifying down of a wider, less discriminating poetic creative impulse into something within very strict limits. Miss Sitwell's development has evidently been towards experiencing more and more of her whole experience and emotion in a poetic way. The difference between her early and her later work is that in her earlier poems only a limited part of her experience went into her poetry, which, with all its entrancing qualities, seemed partial and, at times, eccentric. In her later work, there is a wholeness which makes us feel that, already, before it is written, the experience of the anguish of the modern world has been absorbed by her and transcended within her own personality, for her poems are at once large and broad and extremely personal. *Serenade: Any Man to Any Woman* begins:

Dark angel, who art clear and straight
As cannon shining in the air,
Your blackness doth invade my mind
And thunderous as the armoured wind
That rained on Europe is your hair . . .

The invasion of France in 1940 has already become remote—'thunderous as the armoured wind, That rained on Europe . . .', and in losing its sense of contemporaneity, it has become poetry, and at that, Miss Sitwell's poetry.

Two impressions predominate in the ripe and magnificent later work of Edith Sitwell. One is the music and the other the imagery. The music is, as it were, a horizontal movement which in its long, measured pace has a certain appeal also to the eye: the imagery is very vertical. It suggests upright figures, the sun

in the zenith, corn, the Pillar of Fire, trees, etc. There is more than this: there is also a prostrate imagery of death, earth enclosing bodies in its dust, kings who have died long ago. Miss Sitwell's extraordinary control of her medium is due to her power of keeping things separate. She is like a painter who uses very simple colours, but who makes them all glow and gives them a structural purpose: or again, she is like a composer who is extremely conscious of the use of intervals and of notes widely separated from each other. This effect of separation of the music from the imagery and of image from image can only be attained by the simplest means used with the greatest intensity and clearness of purpose. By invoking the same images again and again, by using very often the same rhymes, Miss Sitwell makes us thoroughly acquainted with the notes of her instrument on which she produces her prodigious hymns.

We are the darkness in the heat of the day,
The rootless flowers in the air, the coolness: we are the water
Lying upon the leaves before Death, our sun,
And its vast heat has drunken us. . . . Beauty's daughter
The heart of the rose and we are one.

Here one gets the long, horizontal, measured beat, manipulated with faint disturbances—the disturbance of a comma or three full-stops—to indicate the restlessness above the calm of a summer evening. The imagery itself all suggests things standing or things prostrate, the rootless flowers, the sun.

Although it is easy enough to describe Miss Sitwell's effects, it is not so easy to say why they are successful. Some critics have complained of the limitations of the material, which they think show a lack of invention. Perhaps these critics are misled by the fact that Miss Sitwell is an extremely inventive poet who has created a world very much her own, into thinking that she ought to invent much more. The mistake here is, perhaps, to think of Miss Sitwell as a poet whose chief excellence is her power of invention. Her greatness really lies in her ability to project the growth of her whole personality into her poetry. She exists in her poetry as Lorca exists in his songs and ballads, and as Van Gogh exists in his painting. The light, the ripeness, the death and the anguish of these later poems, are as accurate a picture as we have

of an interior life of the spirit. This great spirituality is wonderfully conveyed and to ask it to invent more is to misunderstand the great strength and concentration required to breathe life into her images and her music. Far as it is from the English imitations of the Spanish, I think one must look to Lorca for any mood which corresponds to such a poem as *The Youth with the Red-Gold Hair*:

The gold-armoured ghost from the Roman road
Sighed over the wheat
'Fear not the sound and the glamour
Of my gold armour—
(The sound of the wind and the wheat)
Fear not its clamour . . .
Fear only the red-gold sun with the fleece of a fox
Who will steal the fluttering bird you hide in your breast.
Fear only the red-gold rain
That will dim your brightness, O my tall tower of the corn,
You,—my blonde girl . . .'
But the wind sighed 'Rest' . . .
The wind in his grey knight's armour
The wind in his grey night armour
Sighed over the fields of the wheat, 'He is gone . . .
Forlorn'.

Dylan Thomas is another 'opaque' poet who writes poetry for poetry's sake.

Unlike Mr. Graves, he does not extract the pure poetry from experience; unlike Miss Sitwell, his poems are not the hymns of an inner poetic experience within which a lifetime of wider experience has been transcended. To Thomas, simply, every vivid impression for which he can find a suitable image is poetry. In a way, his prose reveals his poetic method even better than his poetry does. For in his prose we see him as he is, a kind of poetic roving camera, who snaps up everything and puts it down as a brilliant poetic image in words as tasty and as full of local sea-flavour as winkles which one buys from a stall on the coast. The obscurity of his early poems was due to the fact that they were poems written without any strong principle of selection to guide the reader through the thick images and the loquacious sounds.

They were often just collections of wonderful poetic insights, sustained by no unifying thought or experience behind them. The difficulty at once disappeared wherever there was a unifying theme, as in the well-known lines in memory of Ann Jones.

Probably Thomas is the poet who has gained more than any other (if any others have at all gained) from having to do war work. Writing scripts, broadcasts, and so on, has given him the sense of a theme, without taking away from the forcefulness of his imagery. There is no fundamental divorce between his prose and his verse rhythms, and this has enabled him to invent new rhythms in his verse, which owe much to prose, without having the diffuseness which vitiates entirely free verse:

The hunchback in the park
A solitary mister
Propped between trees and water
From the opening of the garden lock
That lets the trees and water enter
Until the Sunday sombre bell at dark

This is very close to prose rhythm, and one must not be misled by the elaborate patterns which some of the poems make on the printed page, to think this part of a reversion to regular form similar to the reversion of Auden in his later work. The principle of Thomas's poetry is entirely free, and the patterns which he has arrived at are obtained by listening to the rhythms that come most naturally to him in ordinary speech, and slightly emphasizing and conventionalizing them. Thus, hearing him read a talk about memories of Christmas on the wireless, I understood at once the patterns of his recent poetry which are essentially patterns of speech, the music of rhetoric. Their force will be seen at once if lines such as the following are read aloud:

Into her lying down head
His enemies entered bed,
Under the encumbered eyelid,
Through the rippled drum of the hair-buried ear;
And Noah's rekindled now unkind dove
Flew man-bearing there.

The music and the pauses here are those of the speaking voice.

Words, rhetoric, violent imagery are obviously Thomas's virtues. He becomes also a colourist, a painter of the characteristic landscape of Wales and the West, who has affinities with Frances Hodgkins and Christopher Wood.

Graves, Edith Sitwell, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, all of these demonstrate theorems which prove their hypotheses. One does not have to criticize them in the sense, often, of finding fault with the way in which they do what they can do. Add to them this year Walter de la Mare, whose *The Burning Glass* has all the qualities and virtues which we have come to expect from him: and Edmund Blunden's *Shells by a Stream*. De la Mare's poems create a world which has the peculiarity that, although others may admire it and pause in it, it is not strong enough to provide anyone else with a habitation. De la Mare is an innocent writer whose innocence lacks the ferocity of Blake's. The first poem, *A Portrait*, sums the poet up, with an enchanting and lovable modesty, and it implies also a challenge:

Too frail a basket for so many eggs—
Loose-woven: Gosling? cygnet? Laugh or weep?
Or is the cup at richest in its dregs?
The actual realest on the verge of sleep?

One yet how often the prey of doubt and fear,
Of bleak despondence, stark anxiety;
Ardent for what is neither now nor here,
An Orpheus fainting for Eurydice;

Not yet inert, but with a tortured breast
At hint of that bleak gulf—his last farewell;
Pining for peace, assurance, pause and rest,
Yet slave of what he loves past words to tell;

A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
Who still at western window stays to win
A transient respite from the latening sky,
And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in.

This is a beautiful poem of old age. It leaves the reader with a feeling of envy for a peace, unattainable to him, which Mr. de la Mare after all has won in his life's work.

Another perfectly accomplished poet is John Betjeman. His appeal, of course, is not that he is satirizing the things he satirizes

but himself for liking them. His poetry has the charm of the double bluff. Finally it becomes superbly the minor style which it at first seems to parody:

Intolerably sad, profound
St. Giles's bells are ringing round,
They bring the slanting summer rain
To tap the chestnut boughs again
Whose shadowy cave of rainy leaves
The gusty belfry-song receives.

This is beautiful writing and beautiful observation. One can read Betjeman's poems with pleasure not only in—to quote the blurb—'comic verse whose fun is perpetually trembling on the verge of seriousness' but also to enjoy form admirably handled and things really seen. What prevents Mr. Betjeman being serious even in his serious moments is not the subject-matter which he satirizes, so much as the inability to take himself seriously. He is still always the schoolboy who pretends that he is only pretending to be a poet. But by now everyone except himself has found out that he really is one.

If Betjeman pretends to pretend to be a poet, there is no such pretence about Mr. Vernon Watkins, who wears his poetic vocation with an air as a curate wears his back-to-front collar; and there is nothing funny about it. The first poem in his new volume is an account of a pilgrimage by Mr. Vernon Watkins to visit Mr. W. B. Yeats in Dublin:

But Yeats, Yeats the poet
Under Dublin skies,
After the ten years' journey,
On which no seagull flies,
After the waves of silence
I look him in the eyes.

Mr. Watkins, wearing his poetic collar, presses Yeats very hard and questions him on every subject under the sun. He gets back a flood of vague answers all of which are faithfully reported:

'Tell me about that young group
Of Welsh writers', he said,
'Whose poems in that paper you sent me
The other day I read.'

An image stands on Carmarthen sands
With the black birds overhead.

We are soon on to the Psychological Research Society:

The Psychological Research Society
Lately has found
It can experimentally
Foresee that resting-ground
A second before the fall of space
And the death of sound.

And so on, and so on. In a way this interview is funny, in a way it is sad and depressing in its heavy-going portentousness. There is nothing of the Yeats who gossiped endlessly about George Moore in it. Nor is there anything of Max Gertler parodying Yeats in his portentous vein. Surely, Yeats was more serious when gossiping than when talking all this solemn rubbish: surely Gertler, or one of Yeats's Dublin friends, took Yeats more seriously than Mr. Watkins. If one has to interview people in the style of Lewis Carroll, for God's sake interview some business man and not a poet. I suggest that Mr. Watkins could have made hay of Sir Montagu Norman. Thus:

'How is the Bank of England,
Sir Montagu?' I said.
'Owing to the Labour Government
The Bank of England's dead.'
I watched that brine-grey seagull
Fade behind his head.

Etc., etc. It is quite easy to do and interviews like this would brighten the morning papers.

At his best, Mr. Vernon Watkins, with his grey seriousness, is a considerable poet, because he can produce a very concentrated effect. His first book contained some striking short poems. However, in his second book, he has inflated tremendously his poetic currency. *Sea Music for My Sister at Sea* contains excellent lines, It is a rhapsody of about fourteen pages, one of the great fleet of vessels which follow in the wake of Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre* across the lyric wastes. But Mr. Watkins's ship is an Atlantic

liner and it is never drunk enough. *The Broken Sea* is a sequence of poems written at the time of the Fall of France and dedicated to the poet's godchild, born in Paris. With his grim determination always to be the poet transcendent and never to put any 'news' in poetry (Yeats's own poetry is full of 'news' by the way) we are taken on a trip to Paris without seeing any of the sights, still less what is going on. Oh yes, there is a glimpse of the Sorbonne, but how disappointing it is. Mr. Watkins will stand in the way all the time with his eloquence.

Thus we are told that Owen was 'prophetic', that Blake was 'innocent', that 'Dante lifts the form of man till he bears the stars', that Hölderlin divined a vision of Greece, that Kierkegaard was 'world-moving', and so on. None of this information is sharp or new enough. Probably it is excellent for Mr. Watkins that he should have let himself go so far in this book. He is the kind of poet whose bad work rather confirms one's interest in him. It requires courage to go in so many directions at once as he does in this volume. Also, the rhythms, the music, and the invention, never lose their energy and their impulse, however mistaken the direction may seem. To be able to write so much and with such fervour about subjects which are dangerous to his talent shows that one may expect poetry of great strength when Mr. Watkins discovers a subject in which he may concentrate his strength instead of his weaknesses. It is a pity that Yeats did not say to him what he once said to me: that he had always tried to simplify his poetry, to bring it closer to everyday speech, and to prune it of 'poetic' effects.

BOOKS DISCUSSED

Poems 1938-1945, by Robert Graves (Cassell, 5s.).

Four Quartets by T. S. Eliot (Faber, 6s.).

The Song of the Cold by Edith Sitwell (Macmillan, 7s. 6d.).

For the Time Being by W. H. Auden (Faber, 8s. 6d.).

Deaths and Entrances by Dylan Thomas (Dent, 3s. 6d.).

Shells by a Stream by Edmund Blunden (Macmillan, 5s.).

The Burning Glass and Other Poems by Walter de la Mare (Faber, 7s. 6d.).

New Bats in Old Belfries by John Betjeman (John Murray, 6s.).

The Lamp and the Veil by Vernon Watkins (Faber, 6s.).

The War Poets, edited by Oscar Williams (The John Day Coy., New York).

ROBIN ANDERSON

THE CONCERT

HE had twenty-four hours' furlough, and I had a week-end off from the M.O.I. I had never known an American. Friend of some overseas friends of mine, he was friendless in England where he had recently landed fresh from his army training. His train was late into Paddington. As I stood waiting at the barrier, I was thinking of a quip I had heard from the mouth of a clergyman: America is passing from a state of barbarism to one of decadence with no intervening period of civilization. I was prepared to meet *either* a semi-intellectualized savage, *or* a disarming hooligan.

He was not at all what I expected: exceptionally tall and loosely built, grizzly and spectacled, he recognized me first from my written description. He extended a strong, big-boned hand and shook mine; but the weak, girlish smile he gave as with feigned limpness, I could not help thinking, shocked me. He had caught a cold in camp, he said. His upper lip was very raw, and he had on a shapeless khaki scarf muffled up to his mouth.

The stale odour which issued from him on shedding his great-coat when we got back to my flat did not help me to like him. He looked as though he had not had the uniform off for many days. He paid no attention to the crimson plant I had placed under the skylight in his room; but he did say, to the divan neatly swathed in taut, white sheets: 'I guess I'm going to sleep well, after camp bunks, in that bed of yours'.

This inoffensive remark gave me something of a qualm. I stooped to stoke the fire: the hot coals fell apart, flame leaping from the smoky fissures. I told him that, although it was mild, I had lit a fire in his room because I thought it would be pleasant to go to sleep with firelight making peaceful shadows bulge and dwindle on the ceiling.

After tea, at a loss for conversation (he seemed to want to make a joke of everything), I asked if he would like to hear the gramophone. Not for a moment had I thought that he would care for music. He disconcerted me by his warm answer: 'Fine!'

I had not managed to file a true point on the needle, with the result that the tone of the treble passages was raspy. (I had put on

Beethoven's Fourth Concerto.) With contracted face, I turned to apologize. He was sitting on the floor, his long legs curled up under him. He had removed his glasses, and his forehead was pressed against the side of a chair on which his arms were resting. I took in the flat, cropped, Nordic head, the blunt but slightly Eastern moulding of mouth and nose. Then I noticed the eyebrows—their peculiarly soft and generous sweep.

My gramophone has automatic couplings. I was thankful for this, as it would have embarrassed me to get up and change the records. When the music ended, I allowed the silence ensuing on the last scrape of the needle, and the click of the stopper, to augment until I felt uncomfortable (for he neither spoke nor stirred). Then I asked if he had liked it.

He slowly raised his head up from his arms and looked at me, solemnly—wearily. I doubted whether he had heard the music, let alone my question. It was thoughtless of me to have inflicted my taste upon a stranger whose only wish was to rest his army-wearied bones.

'Did you like it?' I repeated, lightly.

Still gazing at me, his eyes dark with emotion, he replied: 'Never has that music seemed more beautiful'.

Then he caught my altered expression, and laughed. 'Come, lead me to my couch!' he cried. 'I sure am mighty tired.'

And I laughingly showed him to his room.

While waiting for a taxi in the morning he passed two desultory remarks of a different flavour from his breakfast conversation: 'I was compelled to move that exotic plant to make room for my shaving gear on the chest of drawers'. And: 'I certainly did sleep well in that bed of yours—in spite of those gloomy shadows from the fire.'

Some weeks later I had a telephone call to inform me he had gotten himself stationed in London. Would I care to meet him for a while that evening?

It was May, but there was a sharp wind. He had got his promotion. Under the peak of the military cap his eyes had a look of vicious authority; yet his smile, as his tall, green-mackintoshed figure advanced towards me through the pavement crowd, was limply engaging.

He offered his huge hand in his half effeminate way. He was not in the mood for streets and cafés, he confided. He had heard

so much of our London parks. There was something, he said as we crossed the Marble Arch Circus, symbolic about them.

We took two chairs just by the railings.

The iron May wind, sweeping and parting the dusty, dull green foliage of the lilacs, laid bare the budding skeins like pink patches of flesh disclosed, by a fierce draught indoors, on a cat's haunches. My American put his hand through the bars and picked a small, squirming, silvery tassel.

I told him that, if he were stationed long in London, he must come and stay at the flat.

He gently brushed the lilac tassel across my cheek, tossed it on to the gravel, then shifted his chair a few inches farther away from mine. 'It might be only a few days,' he said. 'But it might be weeks or months.'

It turned out to be months, and he moved in on me in his own good time.

The first Sunday of his stay it was a perfectly heavenly morning and I had taken it for granted he would want to spend the day with me. At breakfast he said: 'You're mad about flowers, do you know of some place called Q Park?'

I answered: Of course, and it was a good day for the gardens.

'This Gladys woman has asked me to go with her,' he said, 'so don't expect me back until the evening.'

I wanted to ask who Gladys was, but, as I crossed to the stove to reheat some coffee, I did not ask who Gladys was, I asked where he had met her.

'At my hotel and, funnily enough, the very same evening that I moved in here.' Those were his words; but there were overtones: 'I'm sorry it happened that way, since it might have been you.'

I spent Sunday, as usual, alone.

On my inquiring when he returned how the day had gone, he told me he had seldom passed such a boring afternoon. Gladys had kept indicating the various shrubs and trees and he felt as though he never wanted to see a tree or a shrub again. 'One thing, though!' he called after me in the kitchen. 'You've got a rival in Gladys. She's quite a good cook, too.'

More curious to know if he had tried to hurt me than actually hurt by the unnecessary taunt, I went back into the sitting-room where he met my look by allowing a slow blush to spread up his cheeks and under his quiet eyes until they glared.

The strange thing was that, after this, when I came back from work and, more often than not, found his room to be empty I began to mind.

'Don't you ever think of Gladys and me when you know we are together and you are here alone?' he asked, in a tender way, one June evening when our acquaintanceship had lost the spontaneity of early interchange without having won the ease of tested understanding. It had come on to rain; and the cruel, metallic light outside the sitting-room window made the atmosphere inside the room unreal. Thunder, summer-heralding, in the distance applauded the death of spring.

There was nothing I could reply. My American sat opposite me, the jacket of his smart, dark green uniform over the back of his chair. He had loosened the collar of his shirt, so that I could glimpse the slim, silver identity chain lying glistening between the hairs of his chest. He offered me a cigarette; and, as he lit it for me from his nickel lighter, the college signet ring he wore on his crooked little finger came against my lips.

We smoked peacefully, neither of us at ease.

Near the blurred pane, distinct against the out-of-focus hinter-scene, the lately immaculate, now full-blown, chestnut flowers were being washed away; and the bare rods stood greenly gleaming. 'How soothing,' I said with my eyes on the window, 'is summer rain! I wish you'd tell me about your life at home.'

So he spoke to me, in a gentle voice, of the things I dreaded to hear: Brenda had a face like a horse but her comradeship was unaffected, whereas with Margaret he had experienced moments of great tenderness but her defence-mechanisms were too often active against him. Fay mothered him, she was sweet and kind, but she would claw his eyes out if he *looked* at anyone else—man or woman. And she made him feel he had a mother-fixation. All three hated each other like poison.

'I suppose Brenda is the one to whom you'll eventually return?'

He wreathed smoke from his mouth and nostrils before speaking: 'I suspect she might indulge in outbursts of emotionalism. I'll have to express myself with a few more women before I know what it is I want from them.'

'That sounds as if you were willing to experiment on people at the cost of their feelings.'

'How else can I be myself?'

I said, with a soupçon of bitterness: 'Has anyone ever experimented on you?'

The sight of tears about to gather in his eyes bewildered me. But he instantly lowered the lids. He answered, with arresting softness: 'As a matter of fact, someone has. There's a good deal I haven't told you about myself that I've never told anyone—not even Brenda.'

'All right, then!' I forced myself airily to say. 'Tell me all about your sordid self!'

'*All right!*' he mocked, in the accent that was now familiar enough for me to like immensely. 'You've asked for it. For years I was homosexual.'

Every available ash-tray in my sitting-room was crammed with stubs, ash and charred matches when, exceedingly late at night, we felt we ought, for our work's sake, to quit the smoke-stench of the blacked-out room and go to rest.

A few minutes later, he was standing at the bathroom wash-basin in his dressing-gown with the door wide open, humming some common tune. I was happier than I had been for weeks in the thought that it is a good thing to possess a person's confidence; and this, his confidence entire—more than he had given the Gladys woman—was what he had given me. As I passed the bathroom on my way to bed he dipped his hand in the basin and splattered me with water.

I asked what on earth he was doing.

'Purifying you!' was his odd answer. 'I'm sure you must have impure thoughts.'

There would have been no good then in protesting that I had never once thought about him in that way; yet there would equally have been no truth in such a protestation after that moment. I dare say he was justified in considering me a prig and a prude; but he made it harder for me to change involuntary repression into voluntary control.

Since he stayed out late most nights, it was over early morning tea that we had encounters such as this:

HE: Good morning, my pet!

I: Hullo, my angel!

HE: Tonight I'm taking a bottle of wine with me to town.

I: Are you?

HE: Yes. I've got to find a *body*.

I: Man or woman?

HE: It's all the same.

I: You make it sound quite Baudelaire.

HE: On the contrary, it's you that's jaded, not me.

I: Didn't you have any luck last night?

HE: Last night I was at Gladys' place. Isn't it funny how two people won't go to bed with each other at first?

I: Isn't it natural for a woman to want to get to know the man she thinks of sleeping with?

HE: That's the trouble with these amateur prostitutes—they will hold out on you. Professionals know how to handle things. They're clean, and don't get emotional. I can't abide scenes. No more *tea* thanks! Tonight, I must conquer someone's body if I have to force my wine down her throat.

I: Why not dazzle your victim first, by your own innocent methods, and save your wine?

HE: Don't get bitter! It doesn't suit you. I *have* done it that way.

I: Surely a better way when wine is scarce.

HE: You say true. Well, off I go on my mission. I hope it won't be fruitless!

I: For your sake, and in more than one sense, I hope it will!

And that was our maximum contact in twenty-four hours!

I found myself not working well at the Ministry; and, though no one complained, I knew they had noticed a fall in my standard. When August came to the town, with its dust and its heat and its glare, and holidays were cancelled, I began to wonder whether I would crack under the double strain. He, too, seemed to feel fagged, for he came home earlyish one or two nights a week; and, whilst my own head reeled, I would hold his in my hands.

One stifling morning he told me, over his tea-cup, that he was never asleep, as I supposed, when I tip-toed from his room on hearing his regular breathing. 'Are you proud of the power in your hands?' he quietly asked. Then: 'My barber has the same magic power over me. He's got the right kind of hands. I could go off to sleep in his chair.'

I changed the subject to one I feared even more. I let him know that Gladys had twice rung up the previous evening.

'If she calls me again, tell her to go to hell!' he rudely retorted.

'Has something gone wrong between you?' I sympathetically inquired.

He embarked on a sudden tirade: 'There's no need for you to take any interest in Gladys. I'm fed up with Gladys. She doesn't mean a thing in my life. She's such a bitch she thinks I only go to see her when I feel like screwing her, and it's true.'

I doubted whether my shocked face altogether excluded another expression.

He continued: 'It's these people with neurotic depths to them, from whom you never know what to expect, often people good for nothing but copulation, whom you grow to love. People with whose personalities you feel there must be a constant battle. People you've got to get to know—through and through. It's the people who lead you a dance whom you grow to love.'

He got up from the table. As he shouldered his gas mask, he turned and said, with unusual vehemence: 'And it's precisely such people—problem children—who tear one's heart in two that one must cut ruthlessly out of one's life'.

An extra quota of work fell to us both soon after that morning: our breakfast meetings grew more brief but no less embarrassing. We now never met in the evenings. He worked late, dined out; and, if he did come straight home, I was always in bed. I never knew until that time how tired much crying makes one. I never really knew, until that time, what it meant to cry. Though why I should have cried most at the news of Gladys no longer being anything to him I cannot even now explain.

Then, one Sunday, we both had the whole day free and I brought him breakfast in bed half way through the morning. 'Do you know what one of the people in the downstairs flat wanted to know as I was leaving the house yesterday morning?' he asked in tones so smooth they seemed to smother a mountain.

I laid the tray across his knees.

'Whether we were related in any way.'

'I wonder why?' I murmured, with lowered eyes.

'Perhaps because I feel so like a brother to you,' he suggested. His voice was very kind indeed.

Then I became aware that he was regarding me fixedly in an unmistakable way. Instead of responding, I felt my own face

assume a look of imbecile pride. So that he should not see, I went over to the window where I had stood many times in the early morning after he had gone out, wondering about some double-edged remark he had made over tea, blaming first him for the tension between us, then myself for failing to handle him rightly. Now I knew that neither he nor I were to blame. That he returned my affection I had no doubt any more.

I heard him speaking to me from the bed: 'And it's as a brother and a friend I must remain. Then my feelings will never change towards you. But if ever I'm weak enough to provoke you—and I'm sorry to say I'm still not past such things—have the strength to resist me, for I might hurt you very badly indeed.'

Still at the window: 'I understand,' I mumbled, with a sense of indescribable elation; for I did not understand.

He had started eating, but I lingered near the window, looking out at the few pale burnished apples clinging to the nearly leafless boughs, that the rain, intending to dislodge, only succeeded in brightening. And I thought: *Since I love this man, for his sake I will withdraw my mind from his image, for I would not have begun to yearn towards his soul had he not first attracted me to his form. Pure must my thoughts remain. Yet, if I starve the fire whence the light of devotion springs, what of devotion? For who can sever love from charity? God forge our hands in icy fire!*

When I turned round he had finished his egg and had put on his spectacles to read the paper.

Between that Sunday morning and the October afternoon on which we had agreed to go walking on the downs, clues as to the nature of his design (only to be revealed when it was at an end) seemed thrust at me by Truth's own providential mediators. But, though he confessed to his mother having roused sexual feeling in him when a child, I failed to see why there should be more warp than woof, as it were, in the mind of this man; nor did I link his avowal that his one desire was to be fair to all with Le Misanthrope's reply to Celimène:

'Et votre cœur, paré de beaux semblants d'amour
A tout le genre humain se promet tour à tour,'

when we saw this play together done by the Société Molière. He even warned me, humorously, of his 'other side'. But I had always thought of the good and the evil in a person as

separately encysted qualities liable, at a prick, to overwhelm the intruder with acid *or* with oil.

It was a golden autumn day. From Victoria, we travelled as far as Lewes on the Newhaven train. We had the carriage to ourselves. Once or twice before he had invited me, if I felt unhappy about him, to talk things out. Not having uttered a word during the journey, he put his paper down as we neared Lewes and asked me this again. I told him it was true I had felt hurt and perplexed by his attitude on occasion, but now that everything had turned out well I did not mind. He requested me to give an example of his having done anything to perplex or hurt me. When I found I could not, he gently suggested that my ideas were a little confus—ing, but that, if he really made me unhappy, I should see him no more. I laughed the idea away, and he looked relieved.

White cliffs, within a stone's throw of the station, established, as soon as the train halted, the change of scene. We were delighted by the sea-tang in the air.

The ditches of the dying autumn lane which led us beyond the outskirts of the town still showed a few late flowers half lost among the decaying grass and fallen leaves. We neither talked nor loitered there. Pausing midway up the deeply rutted down-land path to turn and look at the view we had left behind, spreading both his arms to avoid being overbalanced by the violence of the gale: 'This struggle is glorious!' he shouted.

I felt indefinitely disturbed.

Having been misled by many ridges, we reached the summit of the hill at last and stood together in sight of the far, grey, choppy waters of the sea.

We sat down.

Around us, the wind sent agitated whispers through the bending grasses; from far away could be heard its multi-voiced commotion on the waves.

He spoke not a word; nor did I.

Soon, I was assailed by a nameless sense of being separate from him—although I was close by his side. I can't tell why, I felt in that instant that I had never been more alone since the day I was born.

He had been gazing out towards the sea. Before long, he thoughtfully remarked: 'Gladys also would love it here'.

Then he glanced at his watch. 'We must be hurrying back to town,' he said, rising and brushing the earth off his uniform.

I did not sleep well that night in my room, with him next door. I lay awake wondering over something he had casually said as the London train drew in at the Lewes platform: 'Look! Those same white cliffs we saw when we arrived!' And the little story he had recounted shortly before we reached Victoria: 'When I was a boy I had a pet rabbit, and although I loved that rabbit I forced it up a pole which I knew it could not climb. When it fell and broke its back I was sorry.'

I was awoken in the early hours by the cat's having caught a mouse in the garbage pail. When I arrived on the scene, there was little life left in the mouse; but the cat was using imagination to create an artificial state of flight and pursuit: scooping the prey up into the air with its paws, it left the creature unmolested for some moments as it lay panting with hope of escape. Directly it crawled away, the cat pounced, with unnecessary precision. The mouse dead, the cat, to prolong its own excitement, was for reanimating the corpse.

In the morning, my American asked what the nocturnal noise had been. When I answered carelessly: 'Oh, only the cat after a mouse,' all colour fled from his somewhat bloodless, weary face.

Not many days after, he decided to move out. In his speech of thanks to me for hospitality and kindness he inferred that I ought to forget him and find another American who would return my affection in a more satisfying way. I could no more then have thought of transferring my affections than I could have hoped to get comfort from hugging the moon. Yet, though I felt lonely for a few days, despairing of ever replacing that unrepeatable something I had got to know in him, and though I remembered with dismay the desolation with which I had been overwhelmed when with him out there on the windy downland, these memories dwindled and it was as though I were ceasing to be bewitched—for everything he had done and said had been, as it were, a brushing of my cheek with pieces of lilac while pushing his chair ever a few inches farther away from mine. My former sense of personal dissolution passed—there's no balm like time; and I began to love people again, instead of one person. Before long, we were meeting occasionally. I came to regard

him with the affection of a very best friend. Sometimes I thought, with amusement, now that I no longer felt passion, of the first time I had seen him at Paddington, with a raw lip and steel spectacles. Yet, by and by, like a beam breaking quietly through a chink in shuttered windows, tingeing the dull face of a wall with squares of rose, warm hopes began to work upon my cool compassion until, by degrees as hard to detect as hidden snares, rosy suspicions had once more undermined the ivory surface of my placid reserve: I *hoped* he was deluding me—that he was really repressing himself towards me—that, deep down, he found me erotically alluring.

His goodness to me at this stage was amazing. He gave me presents of recorded music, or whole cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes in trim packets of scarlet waxed paper crisply wrapped in amber cellophane (to make up, he said, for what he did not give me in other ways). He took me out to dinner at Knightsbridge restaurants where, even in wartime, you could get pre-war food. I knew he was aware that my old yearning for him had returned even stronger than before; and I inwardly thanked him for now doing nothing to foment it. I would not have appreciated the metaphor of making sure to land your fish by slackening your line.

One evening he announced that he had booked seats for a Sunday concert at the Albert Hall: Solomon's only appearance of the season. He was playing the Beethoven Fourth Concerto. I was overjoyed to think of hearing this with him a second time. He saw me to my bus stop, and, as the bus arrived, said, as if having forgotten: 'By the way, I've invited Gladys to come and hear this music with us. I feel I've treated her badly.'

The pang this news gave was, I told myself, one I deserved. Jealousy in love is bad enough; for jealousy in loving friendship there is no excuse.

We had arranged all three to meet for a drink in his room after lunch on Sunday before going on to the Albert Hall. I had had lunch alone. Gladys was not there when I arrived. My American and I sat talking in our customary affectionate way. Any moment I was expecting to hear a ring at the door, and him to go and answer it. I was astonished when I heard a rattling of keys from the landing, then the front door opened. The door of his room was pushed in abruptly and a middle-aged woman, wearing a

hat of squashed black velvet bows and riding-cap peak, strode in, starting slightly to see me sitting there.

The American got up and lovingly took her arm. 'Oh, Gladys, honey,' he cried, in apologetic tones, 'I forgot to mention I asked a friend of mine to come to this darned concert of music with us. Let me introduce you both!'

Gladys and I shook hands.

The American then left the room in order to wash and prepare.

The cab in which we were driven through the foggy November drizzle might have been Charon's ferry, and the wet streets the river Styx, for all I knew or cared.

The Albert Hall was underheated, and empty, when we arrived—half an hour too soon.

In that vast, icy Hades, under the lofty, overdecorated dome, we make our way to our seats and sit down. The American sits between Gladys and me.

We examine our programmes.

We rise to let some people edge past to their places.

We sit down again and examine our programmes.

The American takes a sidelong glance at me, then turns to Gladys and aims a remark at her, calling her pointedly by her Christian name.

We again get up from our seats to make way for a party passing to theirs.

The babble, that gets louder as the auditorium fills, becomes unnerving.

More lights go up; members of the orchestra enter singly, or by twos and threes. They seat themselves, then set about the cleaning or the tuning of their instruments.

We examine our programmes.

The American asks Gladys, by name, if she is comfortable. She requires helping on with her shop-tailored, fur-trimmed wrap. It grows colder, not warmer, as we wait. The American's breath is visible as white steam on his making a jocular remark to Gladys while pulling her wrap about her shoulders upon which there is a scattering of scurf.

The orchestra is assembled; the audience are in their seats.

On to the platform walks the leader, half acknowledging half-hearted applause.

He takes his seat.

The conductor appears, makes his way through the players to his desk, faces the audience sternly, bows low, in three directions, three times.

Fairly loud applause dies quickly down.

The American, to Gladys: 'A dismal guy. I wonder if he's as musical as he makes out? He looks as though he's had a good lunch.'

Gladys laughs.

The preliminary item (a modern overture by some Italian) is rapidly accomplished. The sporadic tinkling of a triangle on our side of the stage reminds us of the telephone. Gladys draws this analogy to the American. Both throw their heads back and laugh. Both look at me and note I am not laughing.

After the clapping, a few minutes' pause, in which we examine our programmes.

Solomon makes his entrance, waving away the public's applause with fluttering hand.

Silence.

He seats himself—seats himself with care—before the keys, having screwed up the stool.

Greater silence.

A professional flourish of the wrists, and he begins.

The cool enunciation of the plain, opening solo bars. Firelight shadows bulging and dwindling upon the ceiling. *Never has that music seemed more beautiful.* Curled up on the rug I first noticed. Peculiarly soft and generous sweep of his eyebrows. Disquietingly sweet curves of melody wrung from fiddles in unison. The piano is dumb. Extraordinary, his feminine smile. *Gladys is quite a good cook, too.* Bright, staccato notes gathering to a pianissimo treble trilling. Lilac is sickly, but that bitter iron wind in May, then thunder. *What on earth are you doing? Purifying you! I'm sure you must have impure thoughts.* Immaculate chestnut—candle blown down and sodden with summer rain. Green clotted chords.—*Hullo, my pet!—Good morning, my angel!* Isolated bell-like cadences. *As a brother to you, as a friend I must remain. Otherwise, I might hurt you very badly.* Noisy Haydnesque crescendo. Un-Christian revenge? In a few weeks he'll be in France. *Gladys also would love it here.* Falling thirds, parallel sequences, like shooting stars. Alone. Like rain. Pure balm. I implore you. Do not pass on the pain. Do not pass on the pain you have suffered at another's

hands. Semi-Christian retribution, instead of un-Christian revenge? For his own good my policy shall be. Nemesis. It's no good sacrificing yourself. You must stand up to people. Storm of mounting harmonies. *Look! Those same white cliffs we saw when we arrived.* Payment in kind. *I had a pet rabbit and when it fell and broke its back.* Good God! A raid? I never heard the siren. That one must have landed pretty near. Beneath the soaring and the pleading the piano races, merrily sustaining. Forgive, forgive! Ding-dong. It really was extraordinary how fantastically alone I felt up there beside him in the wind. Cadenza allegro moderato. Sheer decoration. Beethoven? Perfume descending from a balcony of cultivated flowers. Now, the light from the fire. Orpheus with his lyre. Neither semi-Christian retribution nor un-Christian revenge. Forgiveness entire. Orpheus with his lyre made trees . . . *Oh, Gladys, honey, I forgot to mention. I asked a friend of mine to come to this darned concert of music with us.* I must hear this bit and then I must somehow get out before the end. I can never see this man again. Immemorial melody. Calm, compassionate, serene, profound, I have heard it before six thousand years ago. Light shed from fire. The fire dies. Then so must the light, unless—Whirlwind. Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend, how wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost defeat, thwart me? Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend. . . .

GEORGE ORWELL

POLITICS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MOST people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilization is decadent, and our language—so the argument runs—must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs

to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers. I will come back to this presently, and I hope that by that time the meaning of what I have said here will have become clearer. Meanwhile, here are five specimens of the English language as it is now habitually written.

These five passages have not been picked out because they are especially bad—I could have quoted far worse if I had chosen—but because they illustrate various of the mental vices from which we now suffer. They are a little below the average, but are fairly representative samples. I number them so that I can refer back to them when necessary:

‘(1) I am not, indeed, sure whether it is not true to say that the Milton who once seemed not unlike a seventeenth-century Shelley had not become, out of an experience ever more bitter in each year, more alien (*sic*) to the founder of that Jesuit sect which nothing could induce him to tolerate.’

Professor Harold Laski (*Essay in Freedom of Expression*).

‘(2) Above all, we cannot play ducks and drakes with a native battery of idioms which prescribes such egregious collocations of vocables as the Basic *put up with* for *tolerate* or *put at a loss* for *bewilder*.’

Professor Lancelot Hogben (*Interglossa*).

‘(3) On the one side we have the free personality: by definition it is not neurotic, for it has neither conflict nor dream. Its desires, such as they are, are transparent, for they are just what institutional approval keeps in the forefront of consciousness; another institutional pattern would alter their number and intensity; there is little in them that is natural, irreducible, or culturally dangerous. But *on the other side*, the social bond itself is nothing but the mutual reflection of these self-secure integrities. Recall the definition of love. Is not this the very picture of a small academic? Where is there a place in this hall of mirrors for either personality or fraternity?’ Essay on psychology in *Politics* (New York).

‘(4) All the “best people” from the gentlemen’s clubs, and all the frantic fascist captains, united in common hatred of Socialism and bestial horror of the rising tide of the mass revolutionary movement, have turned to acts of provocation, to foul incendiary, to medieval legends of poisoned wells, to legalize their own destruction of proletarian organizations, and rouse the agitated petty-bourgeoisie to chauvinistic fervour on behalf of the fight against the revolutionary way out of the crisis.’

Communist pamphlet.

‘(5) If a new spirit is to be infused into this old country, there is one thorny and contentious reform which must be tackled, and that is the humanization and galvanization of the B.B.C. Timidity here will bespeak canker and atrophy of the soul. The heart of Britain may be sound and of strong beat, for instance, but the British lion’s roar at present is like that of Bottom in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*—as gentle as any sucking dove. A virile new Britain cannot continue indefinitely to be traduced in the eyes, or rather ears, of the world by the effete languors of Langham Place, brazenly masquerading as “standard English”. When the Voice of Britain is heard at nine o’clock, better far and infinitely less ludicrous to hear aitches honestly dropped than the present priggish, inflated, inhibited, school-ma’amish arch braying of blameless bashful mewing maidens!’ Letter in *Tribune*.

Each of these passages has faults of its own, but, quite apart from avoidable ugliness, two qualities are common to all of them. The first is staleness of imagery: the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether

his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house. I list below, with notes and examples, various of the tricks by means of which the work of prose-construction is habitually dodged:

Dying metaphors. A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image, while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically 'dead' (e.g. *iron resolution*) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between these two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which have lost all evocative power and are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves. Examples are: *Ring the changes on, take up the cudgels for, toe the line, ride roughshod over, stand shoulder to shoulder with, play into the hands of, no axe to grind, grist to the mill, fishing in troubled waters, on the order of the day, Achilles' heel, swan song, hotbed*. Many of these are used without knowledge of their meaning (what is a 'rift', for instance?), and incompatible metaphors are frequently mixed, a sure sign that the writer is not interested in what he is saying. Some metaphors now current have been twisted out of their original meaning without those who use them even being aware of the fact. For example, *toe the line* is sometimes written *tow the line*. Another example is *the hammer and the anvil*, now always used with the implication that the anvil gets the worst of it. In real life it is always the anvil that breaks the hammer, never the other way about: a writer who stopped to think what he was saying would be aware of this, and would avoid perverting the original phrase.

Operators, or verbal false limbs. These save the trouble of picking out appropriate verbs and nouns, and at the same time pad each sentence with extra syllables which give it an appearance of symmetry. Characteristic phrases are: *render inoperative, militate against, prove unacceptable, make contact with, be subjected to, give*

rise to, give grounds for, have the effect of, play a leading part (role) in, make itself felt, take effect, exhibit a tendency to, serve the purpose of, etc., etc. The keynote is the elimination of simple verbs. Instead of being a single word, such as *break, stop, spoil, mend, kill*, a verb becomes a *phrase*, made up of a noun or adjective tacked on to some general-purposes verb such as *prove, serve, form, play, render*. In addition, the passive voice is wherever possible used in preference to the active, and noun constructions are used instead of gerunds (*by examination of* instead of *by examining*). The range of verbs is further cut down by means of the *-ize* and *de-* formations, and banal statements are given an appearance of profundity by means of the *not un-* formation. Simple conjunctions and prepositions are replaced by such phrases as *with respect to, having regard to, the fact that, by dint of, in view of, in the interests of, on the hypothesis that*; and the ends of sentences are saved from anticlimax by such resounding commonplaces as *greatly to be desired, cannot be left out of account, a development to be expected in the near future, deserving of serious consideration, brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and so on and so forth.*

Pretentious diction. Words like *phenomenon, element, individual* (as noun), *objective, categorical, effective, virtual, basic, primary, promote, constitute, exhibit, exploit, utilize, eliminate, liquidate*, are used to dress up simple statement and give an air of scientific impartiality to biased judgements. Adjectives like *epoch-making, epic, historic, unforgettable, triumphant, age-old, inevitable, inexorable, veritable*, are used to dignify the sordid processes of international politics, while writing that aims at glorifying war usually takes on an archaic colour, its characteristic words being: *realm, throne, chariot, mailed fist, trident, sword, shield, buckler, banner, jackboot, clarion*. Foreign words and expressions such as *cul de sac, ancien régime, deus ex machina, mutatis mutandis, status quo, gleichschaltung, weltanschauung*, are used to give an air of culture and elegance. Except for the useful abbreviations *i.e., e.g., and etc.*, there is no real need for any of the hundreds of foreign phrases now current in English. Bad writers, and especially scientific, political and sociological writers, are nearly always haunted by the notion that Latin or Greek words are grander than Saxon ones, and unnecessary words like *expedite, ameliorate, predict, extraneous, deracinated, clandestine, subaqueous* and hundreds

of others constantly gain ground from their Anglo-Saxon opposite numbers.¹ The jargon peculiar to Marxist writing (*hyena, hangman, cannibal, petty bourgeois, these gentry, lacquey, flunkie, mad dog, White Guard*, etc.) consists largely of words and phrases translated from Russian, German or French; but the normal way of coining a new word is to use a Latin or Greek root with the appropriate affix and, where necessary, the -ize formation. It is often easier to make up words of this kind (*de-regionalize, impermissible, extramarital, non-fragmentary* and so forth) than to think up the English words that will cover one's meaning. The result, in general, is an increase in slovenliness and vagueness.

Meaningless words. In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning.² Words like *romantic, plastic, values, human, dead, sentimental, natural, vitality*, as used in art criticism, are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly even expected to do so by the reader. When one critic writes, 'The outstanding feature of Mr. X's work is its living quality', while another writes, 'The immediately striking thing about Mr. X's work is its peculiar deadness', the reader accepts this as a simple difference of opinion. If words like *black* and *white* were involved, instead of the jargon words *dead* and *living*, he would see at once that language was being used in an improper way. Many political words are similarly abused. The word *Fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies

¹ An interesting illustration of this is the way in which the English flower names which were in use till very recently are being ousted by Greek ones, *snapdragon* becoming *antirrhinum*, *forget-me-not* becoming *myosotis*, etc. It is hard to see any practical reason for this change of fashion: it is probably due to an instinctive turning-away from the more homely word and a vague feeling that the Greek word is scientific.

² Example: 'Comfort's catholicity of perception and image, strangely Whitmanesque in range, almost the exact opposite in aesthetic compulsion, continues to evoke that trembling atmospheric accumulative hinting at a cruel, an inexorably serene timelessness . . . Wrey Gardiner scores by aiming at simple bullseyes with precision. Only they are not so simple, and through this contented sadness runs more than the surface bitter-sweet of resignation.' (*Poetry Quarterly*.)

'something not desirable'. The words *democracy*, *socialism*, *freedom*, *patriotic*, *realistic*, *justice*, have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of régime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different. Statements like *Marshal Pétain was a true patriot*, *The Soviet Press is the freest in the world*, *The Catholic Church is opposed to persecution*, are almost always made with intent to deceive. Other words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly, are: *class*, *totalitarian*, *science*, *progressive*, *reactionary*, *bourgeois*, *equality*.

Now that I have made this catalogue of swindles and perversions, let me give another example of the kind of writing that they lead to. This time it must of its nature be an imaginary one. I am going to translate a passage of good English into modern English of the worst sort. Here is a well-known verse from *Ecclesiastes*:

'I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.'

Here it is in modern English:

'Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.'

This is a parody, but not a very gross one. Exhibit (3), above, for instance, contains several patches of the same kind of English. It will be seen that I have not made a full translation. The beginning and ending of the sentence follow the original meaning fairly closely, but in the middle the concrete illustrations—*race*, *battle*, *bread*—dissolve into the vague phrase 'success or failure

in competitive activities'. This had to be so, because no modern writer of the kind I am discussing—no one capable of using phrases like 'objective consideration of contemporary phenomena'—would ever tabulate his thoughts in that precise and detailed way. The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness. Now analyse these two sentences a little more closely. The first contains 49 words but only 60 syllables, and all its words are those of everyday life. The second contains 38 words of 90 syllables: 18 of its words are from Latin roots, and one from Greek. The first sentence contains six vivid images, and only one phrase ('time and chance') that could be called vague. The second contains not a single fresh, arresting phrase, and in spite of its 90 syllables it gives only a shortened version of the meaning contained in the first. Yet without a doubt it is the second kind of sentence that is gaining ground in modern English. I do not want to exaggerate. This kind of writing is not yet universal, and outcrops of simplicity will occur here and there in the worst-written page. Still, if you or I were told to write a few lines on the uncertainty of human fortunes, we should probably come much nearer to my imaginary sentence than to the one from *Ecclesiastes*.

As I have tried to show, modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug. The attraction of this way of writing is that it is easy. It is easier—even quicker, once you have the habit—to say *In my opinion it is a not unjustifiable assumption that* than to say *I think*. If you use ready-made phrases, you not only don't have to hunt about for words; you also don't have to bother with the rhythms of your sentences, since these phrases are generally so arranged as to be more or less euphonious. When you are composing in a hurry—when you are dictating to a stenographer, for instance, or making a public speech—it is natural to fall into a pretentious, Latinized style. Tags like *a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind* or *a conclusion to which all of us would readily assent* will save many a sentence from coming down with a bump. By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your

meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. This is the significance of mixed metaphors. The sole aim of a metaphor is to call up a visual image. When these images clash—as in *The Fascist octopus has sung its swan song, the jackboot is thrown into the melting pot*—it can be taken as certain that the writer is not seeing a mental image of the objects he is naming; in other words he is not really thinking. Look again at the examples I gave at the beginning of this essay. Professor Laski (1) uses five negatives in 53 words. One of these is superfluous, making nonsense of the whole passage, and in addition there is the slip *alien* for *akin*, making further nonsense, and several avoidable pieces of clumsiness which increase the general vagueness. Professor Hogben (2) plays ducks and drakes with a battery which is able to write prescriptions, and, while disapproving of the everyday phrase *put up with*, is unwilling to look *egregious* up in the dictionary and see what it means. (3), if one takes an uncharitable attitude towards it, is simply meaningless: probably one could work out its intended meaning by reading the whole of the article in which it occurs. In (4), the writer knows more or less what he wants to say, but an accumulation of stale phrases chokes him like tea leaves blocking a sink. In (5), words and meaning have almost parted company. People who write in this manner usually have a general emotional meaning—they dislike one thing and want to express solidarity with another—but they are not interested in the detail of what they are saying. A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent—and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear.

In our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing. Where it is not true, it will generally be found that the

writer is some kind of rebel, expressing his private opinions and not a 'party line'. Orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style. The political dialects to be found in pamphlets, leading articles, manifestos, White Papers and the speeches of under-secretaries do, of course, vary from party to party, but they are all alike in that one almost never finds in them a fresh, vivid, home-made turn of speech. When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases—*bestial atrocities, iron heel, bloodstained tyranny, free peoples of the world, stand shoulder to shoulder*—one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance towards turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity.

In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible. Things like the continuance of British rule in India, the Russian purges and deportations, the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan, can indeed be defended, but only by arguments which are too brutal for most people to face, and which do not square with the professed aims of political parties. Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without

calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, 'I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so'. Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

'While freely conceding that the Soviet régime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigours which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement.'

The inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism. A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find—this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify—that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years, as a result of dictatorship.

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who should and do know better. The debased language that I have been discussing is in some ways very convenient. Phrases like *a not unjustifiable assumption, leaves much to be desired, would serve no good purpose, a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind*, are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow. Look back through this essay, and for certain you will find that I have again and again committed the very faults I am protesting against. By this morning's post I have received a pamphlet dealing with conditions in Germany. The author tells me that he 'felt impelled' to write it. I open it at random, and here is almost the first sentence that I see: '(The Allies) have an opportunity not only of achieving a radical transformation of Germany's social and political structure

in such a way as to avoid a nationalistic reaction in Germany itself, but at the same time of laying the foundations of a co-operative and unified Europe.' You see, he 'feels impelled' to write—feels, presumably, that he has something new to say—and yet his words, like cavalry horses answering the bugle, group themselves automatically into the familiar dreary pattern. This invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases (*lay the foundations, achieve a radical transformation*) can only be prevented if one is constantly on guard against them, and every such phrase anaesthetizes a portion of one's brain.

I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue, if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkering with words and constructions. So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. Silly words and expressions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority. Two recent examples were *explore every avenue* and *leave no stone unturned*, which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists. There is a long list of flyblown metaphors which could similarly be got rid of if enough people would interest themselves in the job; and it should also be possible to laugh the *not un-* formation out of existence,¹ to reduce the amount of Latin and Greek in the average sentence, to drive out foreign phrases and strayed scientific words, and, in general, to make pretentiousness unfashionable. But all these are minor points. The defence of the English language implies more than this, and perhaps it is best to start by saying what it does *not* imply.

To begin with, it has nothing to do with archaism, with the salvaging of obsolete words and turns of speech, or with the setting-up of a 'standard English' which must never be departed from. On the contrary, it is especially concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom which has outworn its usefulness. It has nothing to do with correct grammar and syntax, which are of no importance so long as one makes one's meaning clear, or with the avoidance of Americanisms, or with having what is called a

¹ One can cure oneself of the *not un-* formation by memorizing this sentence: *A not unblack dog was chasing a not unsmall rabbit across a not ungreen field.*

'good prose style'. On the other hand it is not concerned with fake simplicity and the attempt to make written English colloquial. Nor does it even imply in every case preferring the Saxon word to the Latin one, though it does imply using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning. What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender to them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualizing, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning. Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures or sensations. Afterwards one can choose—not simply *accept*—the phrases that will best cover the meaning, and then switch round and decide what impression one's words are likely to make on another person. This last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and vagueness generally. But one can often be in doubt about the effect of a word or a phrase, and one needs rules that one can rely on when instinct fails. I think the following rules will cover most cases:

- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- (v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- (vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable. One could keep all of them and still write bad English, but one could not write the kind of stuff that I quoted in those five specimens at the beginning of this article.

I have not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought. Stuart Chase and others have come near to claiming that all abstract words are meaningless, and have used this as a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism? One need not swallow such absurdities as this, but one ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase—some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno* or other lump of verbal refuse—into the dustbin where it belongs.

PIERRE LOEB

WILFREDO LAM

It is in the West Indies, crossroads of two continents, in this cluster of islands which in so many respects, have assumed an increasing importance, that today, art, the great migrant, has alighted. Throughout the centuries it changes place, abandoning some and remaining for a long time faithful to others.

Pissarro, the true creator and apostle of impressionism, was born in the West Indies, of a creole mother. Gauguin, the first of all the great wanderers, first broke his journey in Martinique. Cézanne's mother was of West Indian creole extraction.

And in the West Indies, where the tom-toms can still be heard feebly beating, where all the atavisms are still alive, and where

blood is more mixed than anywhere else, in those West Indies, point of intersection of routes and of influences, Lam appears in Cuba, at the exact moment when plastic and spiritual influences tend to counterbalance one another.

At the end of 1944 he began to fulfil himself. Now he paints as he draws, master of his craft, ready to convey his message. Starting from Picasso to whom he owes not a handwriting but the desire to set free and the courage to express himself, in full possession of a formidable painter's equipment, he encloses within the frame of Western classicism the attributes of the magic and poetry of the tropics.

During the three years that I have watched his life to which I am again a witness, I have been present at the birth of a work which becomes every day more readable and more mysterious. More pictorially legible and more spiritually mysterious, for now nothing appears any more to remind us of features already familiar. If in places we find the recollection of a form, it is so transposed and intermixed with so many others that we are really face to face with a work difficult to connect with those of the past.

I know Lam, yet I know him rather less every day. I know him because I have had long conversations with him about art and have been able to appreciate his exceptionally broad and serious culture. I do not know him because I have seen him suddenly close in on himself and lock himself up. Unexpectedly, a storm seems to cross his mind: he rolls his restless eyes, a bitter fold appears at the corners of his mouth, and he is lost in an impenetrable mood of inattention.

Lam has met poets worthy of himself. In genuinely inspired passages they have known how to acknowledge him as one of themselves. A few photographs taken by admirers of his work have been enough for them to understand with what an astonishing artist they were dealing. But what extravagances would they not indulge in if they were to see these magical pictures where the most refined colour imaginable is combined with the emotion of his line and form?

Here, where everything is suggested with unusual subtlety, looking at it for the first time, the work appears unfinished. But soon the surfaces of the unpainted canvas reveal their significance. The painting assumes its authentic, exact weight however light it may be.

If ever an artist with a few apparently delicate lines, a few immaterial brush-strokes, has been able to make a synthesis of the blinding light of a country, of its ethnical secrets and of the luxuriance of its vegetation, it is he. He has no reason to be envious of the most talented European artists and he contributes a vision, evidence of Man's reintegration with Nature, one of those signs which will give a new life to painting and which, with all its sensitive human richness, will stand in opposition to the cold abstraction of the neo-abstract painters.

For more than a century, the European artist has been attracted by light and by the sun. Delacroix goes off to Algeria, Renoir follows him there, others also . . .

Having tried to rediscover form, the European is trying to recapture mystery. But the magic of the Negro is inscrutable. For the White Man there remains only one way out: escape into the dream. The artists who call themselves surrealists, by means of an imaginary mystery, transpose into the domain of the 'civilized' the true mystery, the real contact with those occult forces, friendly and familiar to the primitive or to that person who, by atavism, unconsciously carries messages inaccessible to the White Man.

The modern sculptor will not understand the sculptural form of African statuary. Despite all his efforts, the painter revolves around this form and only achieves its surface. He will not grasp the spirit of it. He will only be able to find feeble emotive analogies with the magic of the primitive Papuan, Archaic Greek or Toltec. He will have to search for equivalents in the dream, in automatic writing, in the most urgent spontaneity.

And today we can again find this vitality in a painting by Lam in which several figures—three or four perhaps, it is impossible to say how many, as they are also branches, fruits or grasses—stare at us fixedly with their small round eyes, wings in their backs. . . . A wing as well as a flame has reassumed the symbolical significance of escape it still had three centuries ago in Europe.

In all the arts of the past, in pre-Columbian as in native Alaskan art, a bird is a symbol. In the arts of the time of the Pacific primitives the wing represents the soul in the guise of a bird, escaping from the body which remains on earth in the form of a crocodile. Symbol of escape in the language of poets, in Lam's work the bird is identified with the angel, here the spirit of the forest.

In the plastic world, in which Lam infuses the Greco-Latin world with ancestral magic, in this fusion of two tendencies hitherto antagonistic, we may recognize a direction justifying our expectation of the strangest and most unexpected developments in painting.

It is the privilege of a Negro, with Chinese blood, to have rediscovered the mystery without which there is no art, and, thanks to Wilfredo Lam, it is in the West Indies that the instinct of the primitive and the knowledge of civilized man are going to counterbalance one another.

[Translated by PETER WATSON]

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LETTERS FROM IRELAND

I

MY DEAR JOHN,

Since you appear to want to know so very much about Ireland in all her aspects, I had better start this letter to you by giving some idea, as it is seen by me, of the Irish question. Though there seems little chance of it ever being answered, any more than the Polish question, it is such an integral part of every type of activity that it cannot be discarded, however unpolitical one may be. Therefore, before getting on to the things you particularly want to know about, I shall get rid of this 'continual rub' early in the letter.

The present position of Ireland and England is that of an elderly couple, living apart, hating each other's limitations, yet unable ever to obtain an official divorce owing to the only child, in the North, having become, through intense jealousy on either side, a link which neither can afford to break. The couple are also still materially bound to each other and though any love between them is no longer remembered, a surprising, yet hotly denied, sentimentality is apparent in both. If only the incessant tit-for-tat bickering, always apparent at the end of an old affair, could be stopped, some definite plan of neighbourly harmony might be reached.

After a continual and heroic struggle for freedom ever since

Henry II's invasion, it is only natural when a degree of freedom is finally attained that Ireland should adopt a policy of extreme nationalism and attempt to build a wall round herself, allowing none to enter or to leave. The war, coming so quickly after her birth as a State, was a severe test on these ramparts and, rather than risk the possibility of a breach being made, she adopted a firm, justifiable, and extremely hard-to-follow-through neutrality. Now that the war is over Ireland must try to forget the embittering past and the mistrust she has naturally learnt, if any solution to her internal problems ahead is to be found. At a time when internationalism is more important than ever before the policy of extreme, almost unreasoning, nationalism has dangers and drawbacks and the question of language is one of the foremost of these. The learning of any foreign language, though not actually deprecated, is rendered useless for advancement, whereas Gaelic—naturally included in the ordinary school curriculum, is made an imperative necessity for all Government work. The fact of Gaelic being the language in which all school classes are held means that a lot of time has first to be given up to mastering, to a considerable degree, a fresh language before any progress at all can be begun in any other subject. At the present moment Gaelic translations of all the best text-books are not yet available and the result is retarding to the normal educational standard. To many young Irishmen of an international, cosmopolitan and progressive outlook, who have perhaps learnt French, German and Italian, this is most embittering and the lack of any use being made of their talents has turned them against their Government and caused them to wish to leave their country at a time when they are most needed to remain, to start to build her up. This cynicism at such an early stage of development may be disastrous, as also may be the financial necessity for the best men of almost all districts (especially the hardy, but poor, West where the finest type of Irishman is to be found) to leave home when, again, they should be used for a constructive policy. Though at the present time the enormous number of Irishmen working in England is beneficial to both parties, since they fill labour gaps in England and would cause appalling unemployment and distress were they to be in Ireland, another solution will eventually have to be found if Ireland is to obtain finally the status she has fought for and deserves.

The attitude to the war is probably similar to that found in all neutral States. A slight embarrassment at not having shared in a world disaster shows itself in the anxious questions asked by the Irish people going to England as to whether they will be snubbed or abused when they get there. There is also a large amount of talk as to who received the Axis Ministers or officials during the war, but rising above all this is the anti-Russian tendency of the Press (not to be confused with a Fascist outlook, which does not exist), chiefly engendered by the Roman Catholic Church. In my own opinion there seems little question of neutrality in any war in which Russia might become involved. Up to the time of the showing of the Belsen film, German atrocity stories were almost invariably put down to our propaganda, but at the time of writing the horrors of the concentration camps still provide a chief topic of conversation. Until the Belsen lesson, and particularly in the West, the 'this is not our war' attitude was predominant, though in some very small villages as many as twelve men were in the Allied services. The fact of good pay and allowances must be taken into some consideration here.

Religion, as you know, has a great power in Ireland, and though the element of fear of the priest and public approval or disapproval may enter into the almost universal attendance at Mass, I do believe in the extraordinary faith everywhere apparent. The faith is apt to diminish when transplanted to England or America, but here it is so natural as to be unquestionable.

So far I haven't mentioned those whom you know of by the somewhat misleading title of Anglo-Irish, and in whom you seem especially interested. In reality you are generally thinking of a small section of an old-world squirearchy now dying out, who are so apart as to provide a separate problem for themselves. The fact that some, and for fear of hot water all around I must qualify these remarks, still refer to Roman Catholicism as 'the religion of below stairs', whilst others still refuse to employ a Catholic interior staff, shows how isolated, and exceptional, they have remained. One writer says they are only really themselves for one ecstatic moment in the saloon of the packet boat exactly half way between Dublin and Holyhead. In Ireland they pine for the 'mother country' and in England fret to be back in Ireland. In general they represent a more British than the British 'county' outlook, coupled with extraordinary courage in the hunting field,

and at the same time you can sometimes find an interest in literature not apparent in the squirearchy since the eighteenth century. With their felt hats, peaked caps, regimental brooches (bowlers and habits for breakfast), 'terriers and scotties', and, in the evening, brocade housecoats and faded brocaded Louis heels with which to angrily jab down the turf, surrounded by foxes' masks, pads and brushes, interspersed by coloured reproductions of wild duck flying in over the bogs at twilight, they keep a firm upper lip and splendid isolation against the encroaching nationalism of the country in which they now feel unwanted 'guests'. Though they may cause superficial amusement, it should be realized they have a tragic role usual to the exile.

The following dialogue between a lady in her trap, going to Victory Thanksgiving, and her groom might interest you:

LADY: When are you having your Thanksgiving Service, Paddy?

GROOM: And why should we be having any Thanksgiving, my lady, as we weren't in the war.

LADY: No, you weren't in the war, that's why everyone despises you all and thinks of you as scum.

GROOM: Ah, it's a terrible thing to hear an Irish lady saying that about her own country.

LADY (*now beside herself and crimson with rage*): If you say another word, Paddy, I'll throw you out of this trap and then drive over you backwards and forwards until you're squashed out dead. (*Exit with cracks of whip.*)

A strange state of affairs you will agree.

Now, having described some of the 'background' I shall try to give you some idea of what your impression will be on arrival. We shall imagine you arriving in Dublin at the dazzling white, modern airport, so unlike anything you had ever imagined. After London, the politeness, amiability, cleanness (yes, cleanness), and lack of cloud generally will astound you, as may also the price of the car from the airport to an hotel, which will not be reassuring from the financial point of view. There are no queues and an abundance of all edibles, save for fruit and vegetables which are rather scarce and very expensive. Real iced cakes, real boxes of chocolates, and real bottles of cosmetics fill the shops and you will be treated, on entering, as though you were a pleasure to be seen and not as some further old bore let in by mistake after closing hours. Outwardly Dublin no longer appears

as 'dirty old Dublin', and the wide prospects, pale northern light and tall painted houses strangely bring back a nostalgia for St. Petersburg.

Besides many exquisite public buildings such as the Bank, Trinity College, King's Inns, Custom House and the Four Courts, almost every street contains a jewel of town architecture whether in church or private house. The interiors may be even more beautiful, and the little Chapel of the Rotunda Hospital, the only pure baroque building in Ireland (where the horribly familiar sound of a siren merely announces the birth of a child in one of the wards), as well as the magnificent Italian plaster-work ceilings such as those in the Dominic Street Orphanage or 86 St. Stephen's Green, alive with exotic birds, monkeys, scrolls, and musical instruments, are a revelation. Many of the country houses near Dublin are as fine examples of eighteenth-century design as you can find in the British Isles, and they are fortunately nearly all owned by the families who built them and in a good state of preservation. Powerscourt, Castletown, Lucan, Russborough and Carton are some of the best, though John Piper and Osbert Lancaster would probably prefer the sham Gothic delights of Birr and Charleville.

The slums of Dublin have an incredible beauty of their own, and are situated in some of the formerly grandest streets of the city. With their towering, tenement sadness, exquisite detail of design and appalling decay they sum up all that James Pryde ever tried to express. In a room where George IV may have sat with Lady Conyngham, with the original plaster-work ceiling of clouds and classical goddesses, a family of twelve are now living amidst indescribable filth and piled rubbish, of dirty sheets, cooking utensils and bug-infested matting. It is a region of perpetual twilight.

You probably read an early number of HORIZON devoted to the arts in Ireland so I shall say nothing more on the side of literature, but on the side of painting they seem to have been misrepresented recently by an exhibition of reactionary, abstract works shown in London under the title of 'Young Irish Painters'. In Dublin they were known as the White Stags and, since many of them were only visiting Ireland for the duration of the war, are scarcely looked upon as Irish painters at all. There are, however, some extremely fine Irish artists, and Jack Yeats, now justly

renowned, takes an advanced rank in contemporary painters of the world. Beside Yeats, Ireland can boast in Evie Hone of a remarkable stained glass window artist. Her windows, which you must see, in the Jesuit College of Tullabeg, show an instinctive grasp of the technique used in medieval glass together with its deep glowing colour, and at the same time an appreciation of Rouault, whose lithographs she has often translated into little panels of glass for her own house. You must also look at May Guinness's work. She is a contemporary of Frances Hodgkins and an early cubist, having learnt with Lhôte, and has a good collection of French pictures of this century. Of younger artists Louis le Brocquy stands out by reason of his extraordinary technical ability and knowledge of pigments which he mastered at an early date during several years studying in a chemical laboratory. Norah McGuinness, Frances Kelly and Nano Reid are other painters you must not miss. Though Mr. Figgis, secretary of the Friends of the National Collection, and Mr. Smith of the Dawson Street Gallery, do all they can for the young Irish artists, a Sir Kenneth Clark in an official position, with enthusiasm, is needed to stir up appreciation and obtain commissions and facilities of studying for them.

The Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, owing to the Sir Hugh Lane episode, has few great masterpieces of either nineteenth or twentieth-century painting, but has an extremely fine collection of small and exquisite works such as Constable oil sketches, early Corots and Barbizon school panels, besides good examples of works by Conder, Stott, Mauve, Monticelli and Sickert. You will see that the portraits by John Yeats, the father of Jack and W.B., are much finer than the best of Orpen, John, Mancini or Sargent and, almost unknown outside Ireland, eclipse any other portraits in the gallery. In the National Gallery you will love the small Rembrandts, Turner water-colours and the splendid head by Alfred Stevens.

A visit to the famous Abbey Theatre is probably the greatest single treat in Dublin and, if you are lucky enough to see a Seán O'Casey play it will be produced with the sureness of a Stanislavsky. Synge's plays, for instance *The Playboy of the Western World*, are essentially French in their construction, and in an attempt to make them entirely national this fact seems to have been overlooked.

The chief drawback to Dublin is the extraordinary feeling of lassitude which is very hard to overcome and which is possibly the reason for the narrow, gossipy, and provincial lives of so many of the population, where the size of the city makes everybody else's business and movements an open and widely discussed book. This will probably make you want to explore the rest of Ireland without a very long stay in the capital.

If you are ever wanting to produce a film in Ireland, no matter what part of the world the plot may be cast in, you are almost certain to find a fairly exact counterpart in this country. There is a stretch of coast, near Dublin, between Ballyrack and Bray, known as the littoral or millionaire's view, which only needs a Ruritanian baroque casino and a few Rolls-Royces, to convince the most inquisitive that it is the South of France. Near Galway there is a wide, marshy plain with all the trick cloud and lighting effects of Hungary. The vast brown bogs of North Mayo, where will o' the wisp lights dash about at night, will serve you as the highland hideout of a spy ring. Further south at Glengarriff, in Bantry Bay, the morning mists, creating islands out of the pine trees above the harbour, and miniature volcanoes out of the sugar-loaf hills, only need to produce a red, gold, and black Torii (this film should be in glorious technicolour) to complete the epic you are contemplating from Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji*.

But you have also asked about the little folk, elementals and poltergeists. I don't think you have quite the nature ever to see the first of this fascinating trinity. Recently one of the little men was seen carrying the traditional crock of gold on his back and being nosed at by inquisitive cows. The herdsman gave chase but he was too slow and the little man darted into a hole in a quarry nearby, and though the entire village turned out on Sunday with picks and shovels they never found him. A tiny shoe, found miles into the bog, and therefore not likely to belong to a doll, especially as it had been well worn down by an adult, is still owned privately at Castletownsend and has never been satisfactorily explained away. For any film of ghosts connected with the Dracula or Frankenstein family no setting in Europe would suit better than Leap Castle, already described by Sacheverell Sitwell¹

¹ *The Dance of the Quick and the Dead*. Faber.

as being mortared with blood, presumably owing to the nightmarish history of the castle, where fairly recently three cartloads of human bones were removed from the pit below the unexpected trapdoor. The castle was burnt 'in the troubles', but the fearful elemental still lives there and makes itself known by a foul stench, after which it envelops one's head with the feeling of clammy, wet wool, and at the same time attempts to ride astride one's thighs.

Since this part of my letter seems to touch on the wild and romantic, I shall go on to tell you about Achill Island, which is the summing up in a small space of all the wildest, roughest scenery of the west coast. You must not take the usual advice and go there in the summer when it is trippery and lazy, but go in the winter when the male population are back from potato digging in England and Scotland and are giving up their time to dancing and frivolity. By dancing I mean the *ceilidhe* (pronounced 'caley') dancing, which used always to be held at cross-roads and which in winter does not begin until late and then lasts all night. The band sit on a raised dais, as in France, and keep up a rollicking, infectious sort of Sir Roger de Coverley tune for hours on end. Between dances the crowded hall scatters to the trestled edge where people sit three deep on each other's knees and sing Gaelic songs. The dances are either reels, jigs, or complicated pattern dances of a Lancer type; their names are often very beautiful, and The Walls of Limerick, The Waves of Tory, The Siege of Ennis, Miss McLeod's Reel, The Blackbird, and The Bridge of Athlone, are some of them. 'Nips' of Irish whiskey or 'porter' can be drunk surreptitiously behind the ticket office if there are no bars nearby and no Civic Guards on watch.

The mountains in Achill are nearer and darker than elsewhere, and, together with the Atlantic waves, tearing clouds, and stark black cliffs, they seem to be about to crush to a powder the pathetically small, white cabins clinging together. Only one artist has, so far, ever done justice to this type of scenery in Ireland, and that is the Belgian, Marie Howet, in a privately printed folio of Irish landscapes. It is a landscape to be painted in soot, glue, grit and a hosepipe of pitch. Graham Sutherland would never leave it. Connemara, and even the romantic harbour of Roundstone, is very dull compared with Achill, and only remote and extremely inaccessible parts of North Mayo are

in any way comparable. There, where there are no stations for forty miles and no buses for twenty, are little ports stowed down between gigantic, seaward rising headlands, and you can still hear the fishermen singing sad songs, in Gaelic, about Mayo, relatives never to return, priests bayoneted by the 'Black and Tans', or mothers at 'wakes' for their dead children. In such distant places a pony trap is the only means of conveyance, or an occasional mail car, in which, in a space to hold five, ten people will be crushed with old Gaelic grannies, creaking, cracking and horribly brittle on one's knees. Owing to the continuous emigrations all this western country is remarkably sad.

Perhaps this letter may have given you some idea as to the extraordinary beauty of Ireland, but you are so practical that you will want to know a few of the hows, whys and wherefores of life, not contenting yourself with colleens, boreens, poteens and bog butter. Living is about as expensive as in England, though clothes are much cheaper and wages are much less. Houses, if possible, are even harder to find and quite as dear, though the furnishing is perhaps easier owing to an inexhaustible fount of antiques, and you will be pleased to hear Victoriana have not yet recaptured Irish taste so can still be picked up. For short holidays The Irish Tourist Bureau is invaluable and has complete lists of recommendable hotels where D.D.T. and other insect powders are not necessary. A few de luxe hotels will soon be opened round the country to catch millionaires on air hops, but they will appear extremely incongruous, and owing to the climate they may not scoop as many guests as they imagine. Don't let this reference to climate dismay you. In the two months before writing this there has not been one entirely wet day and few when it has even drizzled, so do forget all the prejudices you have ever had over Ireland and come and see it for yourself.

DEREK HILL

II

Interpreting Ireland to the foreigner is one of my favourite exercises. By explaining Ireland to others, I sometimes succeed in comprehending her myself; for you will understand that, with only three hundred years of hereditary experience behind

me, and not an O' or a Mac among my traceable ancestry, I am under somewhat of a disadvantage.

As an example of the sort of thing that needs explaining, take the two Irish politico-literary centenaries of 1945. On 16 September Thomas Davis had been dead one hundred years; on 19 October Jonathan Swift had been dead two hundred: as far as the rest of the world is concerned, there can be little doubt which date was the more important; very few people outside Ireland have even heard of Davis. Yet the Davis centenary was signalized by a week of State and other functions, culminating in a pilgrimage of Catholic cabinet ministers to the grave of this Protestant Irishman; later the same day there was a Davis memorial concert in the huge Theatre Royal, at which De Valera himself spoke. The centenary of the other Young Irelanders, who rebelled in 1848, was combined with that of Davis; a special stamp and a handsome Government booklet were issued; a portrait plaque of Davis was unveiled at his Dublin home; his statue was set up outside the City Hall, Dublin; and exhibitions in his honour were staged at the Mansion House and in the National Museum.

In comparison, Swift's bi-centenary seemed an academic, unexciting affair of glass-case displays in the libraries, and lectures and leading articles; there was no State pageantry in honour of the Drapier who fought for Ireland at a time when she had few other champions. Not even Swift's encouragement of Irish industries—so important a feature of the Government party's programme—secured him honour as a De Valera supporter born before his time. (This is meant seriously, for there was undoubtedly a skilful attempt to make such party capital out of Davis.)

Those who are glad of any stick to beat Ireland with will find excellent material in this paradoxical situation; but the seemingly misplaced emphasis is in fact justifiable. Davis and Swift were being honoured, not as literary men, but as national figures; hence the inversion of their respective positions. Swift's political influence was a purely personal and topical one; the limited nationalism of the *Drapier's Letters* was applicable only to its own time; it affirmed the independence of an Irish parliament, not of an Irish nation. Davis, on the other hand, went back to first principles, so that no matter what Ireland's future circumstances may be, some of his words will always ring true. He is one of the very few people to have brought new—though not, of course, original—

ideas into our political thinking; those ideas have dominated most of the hundred years of Irish history since his death. The Gaelic League's revival of Irish and Sinn Féin's cultivation of the policy of national self-reliance are but the putting into practice of Davis's ideas. Davis combined the cultural nationalism of the Continental *Sturm und Drang* movement with the militant separatism of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet. Ireland's freedom was not to be granted by England, but seized as a right by Irishmen in arms; these armed men were to be given strength and purpose by their knowledge of Ireland's ancient language and culture, her history and legend, in short, everything on which her right to separate existence could be worthily based.

Unless one understands the importance of Davis, it is impossible to understand present-day Ireland or her recent history. Even those who are interested in Ireland solely because of her late literary flowering cannot properly understand Yeats and his movement until they have understood Davis and his. Yeats paid tribute to Davis over and over again, though he could learn nothing of value in a literary sense from the other's Macaulay-ish verse and leader-writer prose. The Young Ireland movement's greatest literary achievements were its slogans: A Nation Once Again, The Land of Ireland for the People of Ireland, and so on. The best poet of the period, Sir Samuel Ferguson, was in sympathy with the movement's literary aims only. If the centenary reminded us merely of his great elegy, the *Lament for Thomas Davis*, it would be justified from the literary point of view.

It was cheering, though, to see a literary man publicly honoured, from whatever motive, in a country where literature has lately had so little deference paid to it. True, the first President of Eire, Dr. Douglas Hyde, who completed his term of office this year, was a literary man—but Gaelic was his literary language, not English. As you probably know, his most important English writings are his literal prose, and almost literal verse, translations from the Irish. *My Curse on the Sea*, his best effort in rhyme, is in the *Oxford Book of English Verse*; his prose translations were the germ of the dialects cultivated by Synge and Lady Gregory. On the whole, however, the Irish language movement has shown more respect for grammarians than for men of letters—perhaps an inevitable result of trying to adapt what has survived purely as a spoken language to literary purposes.

The chief stumbling-block to literature in Ireland today is the Censorship of Publications Act, 1929. This is being superseded by a Bill now before the Irish legislature, which might be called the Bill for the Perpetuation of Censorship. Its most important provision is the proposed setting up of an Appeal Board, to consist of three persons with legal training, including one judge. The author, the publisher, or five members of either House may initiate an appeal against a prohibition order, on payment of five pounds. This at least is an improvement on the old Act—under which there was no appeal.

Some of the repercussions of the Book Censorship are interesting. In spite of its wealth of innuendo and its reduction of all language to one enormous *double entendre*, *Finnegans Wake* has proved unbannable. One or two Irish authors grasped this while Joyce's last opus was still in the *Work in Progress* stage. I'm not going to let you in for a libel action by suggesting that the work of these authors is scabrous, for it is not, but it must have occurred to them that, so long as one did not overstep the bounds of conventional morality, one could play hell with the literary conventions. The result was two richly humorous novels, in the manner of *Ulysses*, but eschewing its matter like the plague: *Murphy* (1938) by Sam Beckett, and *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) by Flann O'Brien. Beckett's book of sketches, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), though obscure enough, heaven knows, managed to get itself banned; *Murphy*, though it concerns in part the relations of Murphy, 'an unsuccessful solipsist', with a prostitute named Celia, did not suffer the same fate. The nearest Beckett ever comes to describing what passes between the lovers is when he says, 'their nights were . . . serenade, nocturne and alba'.

More fantastic even than the life and death of Murphy, who is burned to death while in a trance in the Magdalen Mental Mercy-seat—where he is an attendant, not a patient—is the plot of *At Swim-Two-Birds*, one of the last books that Joyce, with infinite trouble, read for himself. In it you have, as Graham Greene put it, '(a) the narrator writing a book about a man called Trellis who is (b) writing a book about certain characters who (c) are turning the tables on Trellis by writing about him'. Mixed up with all this is a literal translation of the greater part of *Buile Shuibhne*, the Old Irish story in prose and verse of the madness of King Sweeny. If there was a good deal less of this last, the book

would achieve a mysterious equilibrium between the various literary styles, ranging from epic to novelette, in which it is written. Some of the Dublin dialect is better than Joyce's, and one of the characters is a proletarian poet named Harry Casey, whose bad verse is funnier even than Seán O'Casey's.

If either of these books had had an appreciable popular success—a very unlikely contingency, since they presuppose in their readers an Irish background and a university education—the realist movement in Ireland might have suffered rather a set-back. As it is, Frank O'Connor's *Dutch Interior* (banned), some of his short stories, and Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine*, represent the high-water mark of that movement. The case of *Famine* is interesting; in it O'Flaherty appealed so strongly to national feeling that—although just as strong meat as any of his five banned books—it could not have been banned without a tremendous public outcry. There is, therefore, more than one way of getting round the Censorship; O'Flaherty has published nothing important since, however.

The Censorship has had other peculiar effects: when a good book by Kate O'Brien is banned (*Mary Lavelle*, *Land of Spices*) she follows it up with an innocuous and disappointing one (*Pray for the Wanderer*, *The Last of Summer*). All the time she is being driven further and further from Realism; perhaps in her case this may turn out for the best. I hope you do not underrate this conscientious artist, as so many people who haven't read her do. She is a sort of Irish François Mauriac—read *The Ante-Room* and *Land of Spices*.

I think that a combination of the censorship of creative work and the drying-up of old sources of inspiration is leading the way towards a critical movement in Irish writing. That may be just a personal prejudice, for my own bent is critical, not creative; I consider, though, that Seán O'Faoláin's critical biographies of great Irish figures like O'Connell, De Valera, Hugh O'Neill—who have never been approached in a critical spirit before—are superior to his novels. Impartial history is only now beginning to be written here, and impartial biography is scarcer still. I hope he will write some more of it.

Actually, if you were interested, you could keep up with most of what is good in present-day Irish artistic life from an arm-chair

in London; the *Irish Times* every Saturday, *The Bell* monthly, and the *Dublin Magazine* quarterly, would be all you would need from over here; our best books are published in London, or obtainable there if you know where to look. The one thing well worth coming to Dublin for—apart from stout and beefsteaks—is our theatre; in spite of the dearth of playwrights, it is still very much alive. What impressed Dick Watts, the New York drama critic, when he was over working for the American O.W.I., was the number of worth-while plays he could see here, many of them revivals that one sees perhaps once in a lifetime.

First of all, there's the Abbey; I was there a week or so ago to see O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* again. It was running to packed houses of 'natives' and American and Dominion forces, and I don't think I've ever seen a better production of O'Casey, or better acting from Abbey players—old and new. There's no scarcity of new talent of the type required by the Abbey, as far as acting is concerned. Play-writing talent is a different matter. We are all pretty tired of flash-in-the-pan playwrights here; yet even a flash in the pan is better than no spark at all. Paul Vincent Carroll provided a magnificent flash with *Shadow and Substance*, a play that cannot be mis-cast; it seems to draw the best out of every actor. But if Carroll had tried he could hardly have alienated his public more rapidly than his subsequent plays have done. I've seen them all, desperately hoping that this time the miracle will happen, but it doesn't. There is always too much of everything, and none of it is new.

The best of the younger playwrights, I'd say, is Gerard Healy, also a talented actor, whose *Thy Dear Father* is being revived after *Plough*. There must have been much first-hand experience in this first play of his, but in his second, *The Black Stranger*, he sought to dramatize the Irish famine, taking, as O'Flaherty did in his novel, members of a peasant family for his protagonists. This play was a success both artistically and commercially, but it can only be regarded as a *tour de force*, giving little indication of where his real bent lies. Unhappily, Healy is at present under doctor's orders and forbidden to work.

The Black Stranger was the first play of a season put on by one of the mushroom companies—The Players' Theatre. Founded by a group of Abbey malcontents, it discovered many new actors, and led us to believe that it possessed good new playwrights.

Beginning well with Healy's play, it continued with three other new plays, which, in their varying degrees, emptied the theatre. However, the company's salesmanship was good, and they have all gone off to England to make pictures. Among them is Eithne Dunne, Gerry Healy's wife, by far our most promising younger actress. A Sunday night performance of Synge's *Deirdre* in the Abbey showed that she quite naturally possesses the grand manner, besides her talent for realistic acting.

Next come Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir's Dublin Gate Theatre Productions. This organization was the first to realize Joyce's dream of a permanent Dublin repertory company for performing important Continental plays. It is now seventeen years old, and just as lively as ever. Edwards is a producer of real genius; MacLiammóir is an actor in the direct line of descent from the heroes Shaw used to watch in his Dublin days—Barry Sullivan and the rest. He loves to 'tear a passion to tatters' and his best parts are in melodrama (*Mourning Becomes Electra*), artificial comedy (especially Wilde), and expressionistic plays such as Denis Johnston's Dublin fantasy *The Old Lady Says 'No'*, which clearly owes as much to *Ulysses* as Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* does to *Finnegans Wake*. Naturally, Edwards and MacLiammóir put on Wilder's play during their latest season at the Gaiety Theatre, and did it magnificently, but the newspaper critics, with whom Realism is a fetish, cut up the play. A healthy controversy resulted, but the production was taken off after a week.

Longford Productions, so called after their patron and presiding genius the Earl of Longford, are the result of a Dublin Gate Theatre schism. They command less acting talent than the other companies, but do a number of plays, mostly classics, that one might not otherwise see. Recent examples were Colley Cibber's comedy *The Careless Husband*, Ibsen's *Lady from the Sea* (a good job, this, on one of my favourite plays), and Lord Longford's translation of *The Bacchae*. As I write, they are doing Lady Longford's new play on John Donne, to be followed by the first staging of a Saroyan play in Dublin, *The Time of Your Life*.

The plays I've mentioned in passing should give you a pretty fair idea of the variety to be had on the Dublin stage—but I have left what may strike you as most important until last. The tradition of poetic drama created by Yeats has not quite perished with

him—though the Abbey Theatre has shown little filial piety towards its great progenitor since an ex-Minister of Finance succeeded a poet (the late F. R. Higgins) as managing director of the theatre.

The Yeats tradition is being carried on, and enriched in new and surprising ways, virtually by one man alone—Austin Clarke. First with his Dublin Verse-Speaking Society, then with the organization he calls the Lyric Theatre Company, in brief runs often amounting only to two performances, he has revived Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*, which was almost forgotten in Dublin, and given first performances or revivals of his own verse plays—so much surer in their stage-craft than Yeats's, the comedies racier in their humour, the tragedies compensating by their intensity for what they lack of Yeats's richness. Among Clarke's plays my personal preferences are for the one-act tragedy *The Plot is Ready*, for his most recent one-act comedy *The Viscount of Blarney*, and for *The Son of Learning*, his very first play. This last, a comedy in three acts, was recently given a magnificent performance by the Lyric Theatre Company, with Cyril Cusack, the best of the young Abbey actors and our latest 'Playboy of the Western World', in the title role. It was grand to hear people howl with laughter at a verse play—laughter, I mean, that the author expected and worked for.

Clarke also broadcasts verse regularly over Radio Eireann, and has written a lyric play for the air, *As the Crow Flies* (1942), which has been broadcast several times. It anticipated by a year or two some recent B.B.C. experiments in this medium by MacNeice and others. Altogether, Clarke has written eight verse plays to date. Like most of Clarke's writing in poetry and prose, the plays chiefly explore the medieval Catholic mind, all the way from the pole represented by St. Thomas Aquinas to the opposite one of Rabelais. Clarke's period, however, is both earlier and later than the great medieval flowering, for he goes back to the golden age of Irish monasticism before the Danish and Norman invasions, yet is always slyly reminding his Irish audience that the whole Catholic tradition—good and bad—is still theirs today. The absence of this subtle effect might impoverish some of the plays when performed outside Ireland, but the others certainly deserve a wider public than they have yet reached.

There has been an art boom in Dublin since 1939; partly because some English painters, seeking to avoid the imminent war, settled down here then, while many Irish painters and art critics were shortly afterwards driven home from the Continent; but chiefly because there was so much loose money around to buy pictures with. Still, nobody objects to the boom, least of all the dealers and artists, and Jack Yeats is reaping the pecuniary rewards of a lifetime's devotion to his art. The National Loan Exhibition of his work in June and July enabled one to follow its development over a period of nearly fifty years. There were about one hundred and eighty pictures on view, far too many to take in at one visit; a newcomer to Yeats would have been swamped and bewildered by the richness displayed, but these retrospective exhibitions show how little his subject-matter has changed over the years; he has simply found new ways of looking at it—like most artists whose work 'develops', I suppose, but quite unlike his brother the poet, who was in search of fresh matter almost to his last hour.

The best thing about the boom, apart from the belated recognition of Jack Yeats, is the interest it has aroused in modern British and Continental painting. British artists now exhibit over here regularly, and even hold one-man shows. John Piper's show here at the end of last year was an eye-opener for many of us. His Romanticism and Jack Yeats's have a good deal in common, especially when strange reds and greens flare under black skies.

In August of last year there was held one of the most exciting exhibitions Dublin has yet seen—a loan exhibition of modern Continental painting. Dubliners had never seen so much Vlaminck, Rouault or Bonnard together before, while for at least one person Segonzac and Kisling were completely new experiences. As well, good examples of the work of the great Impressionists and Post-Impressionists were brought together, some lent by the public galleries, others by private owners, and Ireland also mustered five Picassos all told.

The last big show was this year's Irish Exhibition of Living Art, whose avowed object was '... to make available to a large public a comprehensive survey of significant work, irrespective of school or manner, by contemporary artists'. This object it certainly achieved, but I am glad the committee did not attempt to offer 'living *Irish* art'. A great deal of the Irish painting looked very dead beside the modern British work exhibited. (So, funnily

enough, did most of the pictures lent by the French Provisional Government.) I liked the work of two men from the North of Ireland, Colin Middleton and Daniel O'Neill, as well as any, also one picture by Thurloe Conolly, who is likely to go far. Now that the war is over, the mainly English White Stag group—some of whom were written about in HORIZON recently as 'Young Irish Artists'—have suddenly deserted the abstract *en 'masse*. Kenneth Hall, for instance, has taken to painting the West of Ireland landscape; surprisingly, he has found something new to say about it. At the same time he paints it very much as it really is, dark, wet and angular, whereas recent Irish landscapists have somehow located the Emerald Isle in the middle of the Mediterranean, about the latitude of, say, Corsica. Such painting as theirs may help the tourist trade, but holds nothing that would interest you; European artists painted Mediterranean light and colour far better years ago.

As for sculpture, there are people here who still think that a few scratches on a piece of stone are sufficient; they appear to have forgotten that sculpture is a three-dimensional art; I wouldn't have brought the subject up at all, only I wanted to mention Séamus Murphy, a Cork man, who has learnt sculpture the hard way as a stone-cutter. His ecclesiastical work might one day rank with Mestrovic's, if his steady development to date continues. His great difficulty is to persuade the clergy and laity who are likely to give him commissions that a new artistic approach to the old themes is not utter blasphemy; this although they know he is a good son of the Church.

Now that I've read over what I've written, I realize that I haven't really explained very much. Perhaps it's as well. I think on the whole Englishmen prefer *not* to understand Ireland; they adopt towards her the attitude of the Victorian husband to his little woman; she is not, they pretend, a rational or predictable creature at all—and her unpredictability is, for them, the chief source of her charm. Unhappily, a permanent state of being misunderstood demoralizes a woman or a nation.

VIVIAN MERCIER

SELECTED NOTICES

Eclipse. By Alan Moorehead. Hamish Hamilton. 12s. 6d.

'I WAS the last out and I was puffing comfortably along the road when suddenly a voice hailed me across the field.

"Hey you, are you from SHAEF?"

"No, why?"

"Well do you mind not running like that? It makes my men wonder what's happening when they see people running."

'I was much too frightened to be angry. Just the same I wanted to kill that officer. It was a pretty dirty crack at SHAEF at that. However, we caught the edition and got back to our beds in the Lion d'Or in Bayeux. The officer and his platoon stayed out on Livisy ridge.'

Although Mr. Alan Moorehead is a very modest man, as is shown by this little anecdote from his latest book, in the last four years of the war he has probably been consistently nearer to the battlefield than any fighting soldier in the British army. And this nearness has been in time as well as in place. I remember very well in August 1944 being in a village called Trun, just south of Falaise. The days were hot, noisy and dangerous; two nights running my squadron spent in the fearful expectation of being attacked by the remnants of the 2nd S.S. Panzer Division then struggling to extricate itself from the closing gap. Then the noise died down and we got some sleep. Next day I got the *Daily Express* at tea-time—it contained that article of Alan Moorehead's which he reprints on pages 130–132 of *Eclipse*. The village of St. Lambert-sur-Dives which he described as the scene of the incredible carnage in which the 7th German Army was finally overwhelmed was only two miles away. I drove down to see what it looked like. It was the first intimation I had that the battle of the Falaise Gap was over.

Whether by personal inclination or the deliberate policy of the newspaper for which he writes, Moorehead has always addressed himself primarily to the fighting soldier—the man who writes home 'I was there and it was like what the *Express* says'. He has the defects of his qualities. He admits himself that he is not accurate, and his campaign narratives are hard to follow and often unconvincing (incidentally the maps in *Eclipse*, apparently photographs of scale models, are really no help at all). On the other hand his portraits of people are sure and vivid. No other writer of this war has, to my knowledge, done such justice to General Dempsey's elusive but rewarding personality; certainly nothing better has been written about D-Day than Moorehead's description of the feelings of the men taken from their camps all over England and shut up in the wire cages from which, like gladiators before the amphitheatre, they knew they would only be released to take on legendary and terrifying opponents. Of the people of Europe he writes, too, with penetration and sympathy: what is it then that makes him so diffident?

I think the clue comes at the beginning of *Eclipse* where he describes the happiness of a few days spent at Taormina before the invasion of Italy where at his table 'there would often be boys who had come in directly from the fighting, or commandos who were crossing into Italy that night, or others again who had arrived by air from London and New York and Cairo'. An

insensitive man would have felt a measure of self-importance in their company, a timid man might have felt relief in not being exposed to the dangers they were running, Moorehead, a brave and sensitive man, felt shame. Unlike the soldier who, knowing that his turn for dangerous duty will come, sees only advantage in tranquillity, the war reporter, largely his own master, does not think his work ended when he has heard the general's appreciation, but is immediately on his way to see the forward troops go into action. Imbued by this self-sacrificing fire, the Press correspondents have in the British army suffered relatively higher casualties than any other arm; in this spirit they flew in aeroplanes to Berlin and in gliders to Arnhem; in this spirit they died in Burma. Nor have they left a memorial more enduring than brass. At the best they achieved a felicitous and striking description such as the passage I have already referred to on the closing of the Falaise Gap or some of Howard Marshall's broadcasts; at the worst an unconsidered and unconvincing bombast (as for example this description of the epic capture of the Nijmegen bridge—'maddened by this (message) the tanks on the southern bank attacked again, swept through the roundabout, then down the cliff and across the bridge').

In interpreting to the world the feelings of the combatant soldier the Press correspondents did arduous and dangerous work conscientiously and skilfully; they coped with equal success with the demands of circulation managers and security officers, and yet did not lose the sympathy of those of whom they wrote. What they wrote should be judged as journalism and not as literature or history. *Eclipse*, by the best of the British war correspondents, tells the story of the Italian campaign from the capture of Sicily to the fall of Rome and of the fighting in North-Western Europe from the Normandy landings to the final German collapse. Mr. Moorehead, without achieving the glamour of Ernie Pyle, has shown himself to be a first-class reporter and must have gained the lasting respect of many newspaper readers. As a commentator he is sympathetic and urbane, and he has produced in *Eclipse* a survey of the two campaigns which will hardly be bettered until it is superseded by the official histories.

H. D'AVIGDOR-GOLDSMID

Orion, Vol. II. Nicholson and Watson. 6s.

New Road, 1945. Grey Walls Press. 10s. 6d.

Focus One. Denis Dobson Ltd. 8s. 6d.

Now, 5. Freedom Press. 2s.

OF these four serious periodicals *Orion* is much the best because the writers are less cagey and more sympathetic. Even in detached biographical studies a reader likes to feel that authors can describe storms or frightened dives for cover because they will admit that they too have suffered. Many of the writers in *New Road*, *Focus One*, and *Now*, give the impression that they are studying the world from a wooden perch.

Orion has a warmth in nearly all the contributions, whether it is in an edgy, but fascinating, correspondence between Virginia Woolf and Logan Pearsall Smith, or in analysed 'Notes on Writing a Novel' by Elizabeth Bowen, which, though strict, communicate a passion for a good novel. There are two vivid childhood reminiscences, Margaret Lane writes an absorbing account of two isolated old ladies completely cut off in a valley, and Eric Bligh gives a

picture of Tooting before it became a part of Metroland. In spite of the difference of landscape and experience, their stories will recall everyone's childhood. The poetry is of a higher standard than is usual in periodicals, and there is an interesting long poem by Alexander Henderson, in which the fault is the rare one of having too much content rather than too little. There are good essays, and there is a brilliant article by Osbert Sitwell, whose talent rises with the interest of his subject, and he describes Sickert with a racing intensity not found in descriptions of his ancestors. Altogether *Orion* must be bought if it can be, the only disappointment is a story by Irene Nicholson, which lapses into sentimental unreality.

The prose in *New Road* is solid, and Herbert Read adds to his achievement discussing 'Power Politics and Human Values', as he does also in *Now* with an excellent article on 'Greeks and Barbarians'. The poverty of the poets is depressing, even Alex Comfort disappoints. Undeterred by their enormous overdrafts they continue to present their large cheques, Kenneth Patchen and Nicholas Moore in particular, produce real bouncers. Some of the translations of European poets have a flicker from the light of the original, true poetry. Henry Miller contributes an article on D. H. Lawrence, which contains his mixture of shrewd diagnosis and tangles of coloured wool. The most interesting article, however, is a translation of Dostoevsky's impressions of London.

Focus One, a new volume, begins with an extremely interesting symposium on Kafka and Rex Warner, where fourteen writers, ranging from Tom Harrison to R. Friedman, give their particular views. The result is lively and it is to be hoped that the editors repeat the idea. Curiously enough, each criticism with its own illumination, does not seem to alter anyone's original judgement of these admirable writers. G. W. Stonier complains that 'clouds have gathered round the idea of allegory'. This reviewer suggests a possible reason for some readers; being a visualizer, and seeing, unfortunately, a picture for every word in the language, in allegory there are *two* pictures, the original word or phrase and the symbolical meaning, so that the strain of this double vision, coupled with the pressure already in Kafka's nightmare stories, lingers for weeks. There is a falling-off of quality when the symposium is finished, and only Vernon Watkins with two poems is outstanding.

Now is heavy going, except for Herbert Read and Jean Rollin on 'French Literature Today'. It is startling, having read Julian Symons with a sigh in *Focus One* to read another article by him saying almost the same things, and the sigh becomes a snarl. Here is someone completely destructive who appears to be neurotically jealous of all contemporary writers (it is significant that the bitterest of those who want to write and can't, always reveal themselves by this obsession with contemporaries, either by attack or by a refusal to consider them); he goes steadily through each rival, eliminating them all, and then concludes with irritating unction, that the only way out is for all art to cease. The twentieth century has produced a new science which leads to self knowledge, and if Mr. Symons has failed to learn from it he should at least recognize that, if those loose words, used so often in his form of criticism, 'bourgeois' and 'defeatist' mean anything, then there is nothing more bourgeois or defeatist than the desire to kill art.

DIANA WITHERBY



WILFREDO LAM: The jungle. Oil. 1943

Coll. Museum of Modern Art, New York



Fruta-bomba. 1944



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‘Marcheuse d’Îles.’ Oil, 1944
Gift of Mr. Gérard Lacote, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Haïti

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